How Sociology Lost Public Opinion: A Genealogy of a Missing Concept in the Study of the Political

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Abstract

In contemporary sociology the once prominent study of public opinion has virtually disappeared. None of the leading theoretical models in the closest disciplinary subfield (political sociology) currently provide ample or sufficiently clear space for consideration of public opinion as a possible factor in shaping or interacting with key policy or political outcomes in democratic polities. In this article, we unearth and document the sources of this curious development and raise questions about its implications for how political sociologists have come to understand policy making, state formation, and political conflict. We begin by reconstructing the dismissal of public opinion in the intellectual reorientation of political sociology from the late 1970s onward. We argue that the most influential scholarly works of this period (including those of Tilly, Skocpol, Mann, Esping-Andersen, and Domhoff) face an underlying paradox: While often rejecting public opinion, their theoretical logics ultimately presuppose its operation. These now classical writings did not move toward research programs seeking engagement with the operation and formation of public opinion, even though our immanent critique suggests they in fact require precisely this turn. We address the challenge of reconceptualizing how public opinion might be productively integrated into the sociological study of politics by demonstrating that the major arguments in the subfield can be fruitfully extended by grappling with public opinion. We conclude by considering several recent, interdisciplinary examples of scholarship that, we argue, point the way toward a fruitful revitalization.

In contemporary sociology, the once prominent study of public opinion is at risk of completely disappearing. With few exceptions, this conclusion holds whether public opinion is considered a mechanism of social change or more prosaically an outcome of interest. None of the leading contemporary theoretical models in the subfield of sociology most directly linked to the study of public opinion—political sociology—treats mass opinion as a possible factor in shaping policy or political outcomes in democratic polities. Indeed, a number of leading political sociologists have aggressively and categorically dismissed public opinion in their theoretical writings. A student new to contemporary political sociology, reading its major

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contemporary theories, could hardly conclude anything other than the study of public preferences is of little significance and provides few analytic insights or opportunities for fruitful investigation.

The vision of political life that much of sociology propagates today is strikingly at odds with the defining works of postwar political sociology, where public opinion was a central object of analysis (both as a set of mechanisms of social change and as an outcome to be analyzed). To read such midcentury classics as Samuel Stouffer's (1955) *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* or Seymour Martin Lipset's ([1960] 1981) *Political Man,* for example, is to be taken to another scholarly world. For Lipset, as for many of his midcentury peers, the challenge of understanding cross-national variation in political processes and outcomes rested in large measure on cross-national differences in pubic opinion (see also Alford 1963; Almond and Verba 1963; Kornhauser 1959; Lipset 1963, 1996a). The "democratic class struggle," as Lipset ([1960] 1981:230) once called it, offered a rich characterization of the electoral systems of capitalist democracies that centered on the capacity of political parties to win the allegiance of their class members against the emerging challenges of a "mass society" in which citizens' attitudes threatened to become unanchored by social location (and authoritarian parties politically viable). Indeed, it is fair to say that the central problem of late 1950s political sociology—the contest between the "social bases of politics" models associated with the "Columbia School" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948) and the social-psychological emphasis on citizens' preferences endorsed by the "Michigan School" (Campbell et al. 1960)—turned in large measure on understanding how individual citizens orient themselves toward the issues and electoral contests of the day. In both traditions, the dissection of public opinion as a key factor in democratic politics was very much at the forefront of theory and research.

The contrast between the political sociology of its founding era with the treatment of political processes and change in contemporary political sociology is sharp indeed. As one textbook in the field aptly put it, "what had once been the meat and potatoes for political sociologists has become a side order, at best" (Orum and Dale 2008:41). Sure enough, in a review we conducted of recent textbooks in the subfield of political sociology—where the treatment of public opinion should find its most logical home—we find that opinion is seen as orthogonal to policy and political struggles.[1] To be sure, when political sociology took its structural and historical turn from the late 1970s onward, attention to macro topics such as states, revolutions, and social movements pushed the field in new and exciting directions. Yet shifting research agendas were not, by themselves, the sole source of scholarly neglect of public opinion. Rather, influential scholars actively worked to dismiss the notion that public opinion could be viewed as a significant factor in sociological work on such topics as state formation and collective action. Increasingly, public opinion came to be viewed as an individual and behaviorist phenomenon, of little relevance in the comparative, institutional, and movement-oriented agendas that were coming to dominate the field.

One of the more common and sweeping dismissals has involved lumping public opinion—a potentially well-measured concept—alongside vaguer and less precise concepts of "national values," and then categorically rejecting both as sources of political change (e.g., Orloff 1993:51–59; Prasad 2006:20–21; Skocpol 1992:15–23; Steinmo 1994). Skocpol put the problems of the national values school in the following terms:

> Scholars of the national values school … have so far failed to pinpoint exactly how cultural values, intellectual traditions, and ideological outlooks have concretely influenced processes of political conflict and policy debate. … Arguments about national values are too holistic and essentialist to give us the explanatory leverage we need to account for variations in the fate of different social policies, or for changes over time in the fate of similar proposals. (1992:16–17)

Other kinds of categorical dismissals of public opinion can be found in the writings of leading political sociologists. C. Wright Mills (1959) famously dismissed the early work of Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues at Columbia's Bureau of Social Research as producing "dustbowl empiricism." More recently, G. William Domhoff has argued that "public opinion surveys present only a rough idea of what people generally think

because the results are highly sensitive to a number of factors. ... Polls may even create the impression of public opinion on questions in which none actually exists" (Domhoff 1998:172; a similar view is expressed by Bourdieu 1979). Extending this line of reasoning one step forward, Griffin, Devine, and Wallace (1985:385) argued that mass preferences lack the capacity to be an independent causal force because "public opinion is often manufactured and then manipulated by state managers seeking to rationalize actions that are already a matter of policy" (see also Akard 1992; Ginsberg 1986). Some historical institutionalists have proposed similar arguments against the rational choice view that citizen preferences exist independent from, or prior to, their engagement with political institutions (e.g., Immergut 1998; Thelen and Steinmo 1992:9; but cf. Thelen 1999:375).

In this article, we reconstruct the genealogy of the concept of public opinion in the field of political sociology, offering a critical assessment of the consequences of its devaluation. It is possible to see our effort as partially overlapping with the important, nascent movement among some cultural and political sociologists to understand the broader intersection of cultural influences and political processes and outcomes (cf. Alexander 2006, 2010; Steinmetz 1999). But the goals and scope of the new cultural sociology are both broader and somewhat orthogonal to the classic question of public opinion. Indeed, culture for many (but by no means all) scholars has emerged as an umbrella concept underneath which a number of social and political processes—including repertoires, frames, symbolic boundaries, and collective memories—have been proposed to understand political and institutional change (e.g., Fourcade 2011; Lamont and Thevenot 2000; Swidler 2001). And key to our concerns here, public opinion per se remains largely outside of most culture-centered scholarship.[2]

At the outset, any discussion of public opinion includes the inevitable challenge of providing a concise definition of the concept. As with other contested concepts, public opinion has been understood in a wide variety of ways by social theorists and empirical researchers (Herbst 1993). A simplistic definition of public opinion is simply those attitudes measured in opinion polls and surveys. Yet even such a definition—and indeed, the hegemonic status of the opinion poll in representing the views of the public—raises many challenging questions (Perrin and McFarland 2011). Skeptics doubt whether "true" opinions can be measured through polls, given their limitations as measurement instruments (and/or the limitations of those being polled, who may have to guess about questions about which they have not thought deeply). Furthermore, in the classic challenges of Blumer ([1948] 1969) and Bourdieu (1979), whether the public can be represented at all by the aggregation of individual responses to survey questions remains a vexing issue. Finally, the historical limitations of poll-based definitions of public opinion are also significant; the advent of the modern opinion poll in the 1930s hardly marks the beginnings of the public or the political relevance of mass consciousness (Tilly 1983).

A viable understanding of public opinion, and a workable definition, thus compels us to make two important distinctions at the outset. First, all representations of the public are necessarily partial and incomplete. Opinion surveys may have their limits, but alternatives to the opinion survey are often fraught with equal (if not greater) amounts of uncertainty and even bias. Standardization, reliability, and representativeness endow surveys with well-known powers and properties, ones that complement and extend in key ways the reach of research based on in-depth interviews, archival research, focus groups, and/or participant-observation accounts (Vaisey 2009; Verba 1996). Our point is not that surveys or laboratories always provide better answers to puzzles about mass consciousness, just that at least for purposes of discussion even critics of such research must own up to the limitations of other types of empirical research.

Second, however they become visible and with whatever mistakes they include, public opinion poll and survey results often shape and constrain actors (including politicians, policy makers, interest groups, and social movement organizations), irrespective of their ultimate truth content. That is to say, regardless of how key actors read public opinion and the public mood, what they think they are can affect their behavior in a wide variety of contexts. Democratic politicians and political parties subject to reelection have obvious incentives to learn about public opinion and make some efforts to get it right. Where the link between public opinion and public policy has been examined, it is often (but not always) a significant causal factor

(as we discuss in more detail below). The state of public opinion, when it is known or merely perceived, shapes the rhetoric and behavior of interest groups, corporate actors, and insurgent movements. These organizations will try to take advantage of those elements of public attitudes that support their case in presenting demands or making policy proposals. They also use carefully crafted appeals (or "frames") thought to resonate with the broader public. The struggle over public opinion is, in other words, a key part of the struggle for power.

These are considerations that point to the larger agenda of this article. But to sharpen and give substance to our case for a restoration of public opinion, we first unpack in some detail the influential work of five key theorists (Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Gosta Esping-Andersen, Michael Mann, and G. William Domhoff) who have made major contributions to the field of political sociology while simultaneously sidelining public opinion. Paradoxically, we will argue, each of these scholars (and/or the school of thought he or she has inspired) employs concepts analytically close to public opinion, even while neglecting or rejecting its potential significance. Our analysis brings into focus this paradox, and an immanent critique demonstrates the importance of addressing the underlying tensions in these positions. In the final part of the article, we broaden the focus outward to consider how emerging and interdisciplinary research on public opinion suggests a productive way forward.

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

The complicated, shifting relationship of sociology to public opinion has a long intellectual history. The origins of a sociological conception of public opinion as a concept can be traced in large part to the writings of the nineteenth-century French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde, who recognized in interpersonal exchange and group processes the formation of networks of opinion and processes of "imitation" (Tarde 2011). Marx, Weber, and Durkheim each gave some attention to the role of mass consciousness and ideology in ways that could be seen as laying the foundations for later, more systematic scholarship. Durkheim's notion of the "collective conscience" provided one early and widely known vision of the possibility of public opinion, albeit largely limited to premodern societies (Durkheim [1890] 1997). The now classic treatments of public opinion in postwar political sociology, however, drew inspiration primarily from Marx and Weber (see, e.g., Lipset 1996b).

For Marx, the linkages between economy and society and the prospects for revolution can be seen in the forms of consciousness created by (or in conflict with) the dominant mode of production and the patterns of class conflict it generates. This is true whether we are talking about the class struggle model of history made famous in the *Communist Manifesto* or the more structural accounts of historical materialism dominant in Marx's later writings. Marx and Engels's writings on class struggle as a motor force of history, most notably in the *Manifesto,* highlighted how the forms of consciousness (ultimately including beliefs/attitudes of subordinate classes) are critical to creating revolutionary conditions. It is only when workers believe in the possibility of socialism and its virtues (combined with certain objective conditions) that revolution becomes possible. But even where consciousness is not emphasized as the motor of revolution, Marx still sought to provide a vigorous theory of mass consciousness. For example, the famous base-superstructure metaphor deployed in his 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* rests on the idea that to reproduce itself and maintain dominance, the dominant classes in an economic system must inculcate a particular kind of consciousness (along with political and legal institutions that reinforce expropriation).

Later Marxists played with these ideas in interesting ways. Issues about the origins and consequences of mass consciousness arise in the tradition of Western Marxism primarily associated with Antonio Gramsci (1971). Here, the question is reversed: How are capitalist states able to maintain popular support for inegalitarian institutions even among important segments of an exploited and dominated working class? Two major alternatives have historically contended for influence: through forms of class compromise (cf. Przeworski 1985) or through mystification and false consciousness (Horkheimer and Adorno [1948] 2002;

Lukacs [1923] 1967). The former emphasizes that because (and as long as) workers and other subordinate groups can make real gains under capitalism (especially with the rise of the welfare state), they have few incentives to opt for the greater uncertainties of socialism. The rise of the technologies of mass consumption provides a powerful vehicle for the second view (cf. Marcuse 1964). Here, it is through ideological exhortation and/or confusion that workers fail to recognize capitalism as a system that exploits them and hence rarely find revolutionary appeals attractive.

Contemporary neo-Marxist social scientists have sometimes not shied away from engaging the concept of public opinion, even while remaining skeptical of any attempt to decouple it from material conditions. Stephens once claimed that "public opinion is nothing but a reflection of class consciousness, which is in turn a product of definite social forces, one of which is the level of labor organization" (1979:71). Such a conception of class consciousness would be controversial for many Marxists, where underlying consciousness rooted in the lived experience of class is not easily tapped in conventional surveys (cf. Fantasia 1988). Yet although Marxian-inspired writings generally make a distinction between forms of underlying consciousness rooted in lived experience and specific attitudes, investigation of the latter can be found. Wright (1985, 1997), for instance, has used survey data and methods to explore whether individuals in different classes express policy attitudes that reflect underlying degrees of "class consciousness" (see also Jackman and Jackman 1983; Vannemann and Cannon 1987). Fielding identical survey items in 5 countries in 1980, then expanding and replicating them in 12 countries in the early 1990s, Wright (1985, 1997) finds evidence for a (nationally variable) patterning of attitudes with respect to class-oriented issues. Swedish workers and their middle-class allies are, for instance, further apart from the views of the Swedish bourgeoisie than the same groups in the United States. Svallfors (2006) uses data from the International Social Survey Program to examine cross-national variation in class differences on a range of topics relating to social justice and inequality. Like Wright, he finds evidence that workers are more social democratic in their attitudes within Northern Europe than in Britain and the United States, with significantly wider class differences in all the European countries (including Britain) than in the United States.

While not framed using a language of public opinion, the puzzle of popular consent to capitalism invokes questions about mass opinion among the working class that are quite close to those of conventional public opinion analysis. The implicit expectation that the poor would or should prefer to appropriate the rich on the basis of economic rationality gives rise to a fundamental, public opinion puzzle (cf. Roemer 1998; Shapiro 2002): Why don't the more numerous nonrich use the resources provided by elections to redistribute the wealth of the most affluent? Given the reluctance of the vast majority of poor and middle-class citizens to demand exorbitant taxes on the rich, analysts of political inequality motivated by the Marxist puzzle have turned to a range of public opinion answers, such as the roles of religion and religious beliefs as a counterweight to socialism or welfare capitalism (Frank 2004; Roemer 1998), the role of race or ethnic factors in dividing the working class (Roemer, Lee, and van der Straeten 2007), or the effects of reform-oriented policies and provisions in pacifying the working class (Bowles and Gintis 1986; Przeworski 1985).

For Weberians, questions of ideology figure in different ways in relation to democratic polities and the rise of modern states (cf. Steinmetz 1999:16). There are several observations about Weber's analysis of culture and political legitimation that are relevant. For Weber himself, the bases of legitimate authority, and the form they take across time and space, were central problems of sociological inquiry into the foundations of political order and power (Weber [1922] 1978:212–301). While at one level, the rise of legal-rational bureaucracy implies a response to the problem of legitimate authority, it does so at least in part because most citizens readily accept the rule of law and bureaucratic administration as normatively preferable to the alternative (a point that Habermas 1970:62–122, 1975 makes in some of his early essays on the technocratization and public opinion in "late" capitalist societies).

Weber's focus on the role of religious consciousness in shaping the possibilities for social and economic development, most famously developed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* provides a second path to public opinion.[3] Weber's primary focus here is on the impact of religion on individual behavior and the connection between work and income as expressions of individual worthiness for salvation. The

rise of a political and legal infrastructure promoting market-based exchange depends, at least in part, on the willingness of citizens to accept those institutional outcomes as appropriate. Neo-Weberians have explored how and in which ways dominant religious traditions shape processes of institutional development, state formation, and public policy (Gorski 2003; Mann 1986, 1993) and welfare policy (Hicks 2006; Kahl 2005).

Political Sociology at Midcentury

The organization of the field of political sociology largely after World War II built on some of the foundations from the classical heritage, even while it significantly reshaped many of its key insights. One central figure was Seymour Martin Lipset, who once famously described his own standpoint as one of "apolitical Marxism" (Lipset [1960] 1981:521). Lipset argued that the rise of the educated middle class, and its distinctive values and policy preferences, were key to understanding the emergence and historical robustness of Western democratic capitalism.

Marxian-inspired questions about the consciousness of the working class (in an era of rising affluence) and other sources of socioeconomic influence on political orientation and attitudes provided another set of questions (e.g., Bell 1960; Centers 1949; Lipset [1960] 1981; see Rossi 1959 for a review of work in that era) that motivated scholarly research and debate. During this same time, other scholars focused less on class and status and more on how social networks and workplace organizations shaped the attitudes and political behaviors of individuals and groups (e.g., Berelson et al. 1954; Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). Yet in both class-centered and social network traditions, questions of how politically relevant opinions and identities were shaped (and occasionally remade) were fundamental concerns.

Important traces of the Durkheimian notion of social solidarity and the collective conscience carried forward in midcentury work that focused on the role of "national values" as key to understanding sociopolitical variation. Almond and Verba (1963), in their *The Civic Culture,* for example, suggested in their five-nation study that polities have distinctive political cultures that grow out of underlying civic values and orientations of citizens. The idea that a dominant set of national values can be identified in one strand of scholarship on the welfare state (e.g., Rimlinger 1971) was very much alive in midcentury theories of "American exceptionalism" (Hartz 1955; Hofstadter 1965; Lipset 1963; see also Bellah et al. 1985). Similarly, Inglehart's (1977) model of political change emphasized cross-national variation in political outcomes based on the relative importance of "materialist" and "postmaterialist" values.

HOW, WHEN, AND WHY SOCIOLOGY LOST PUBLIC OPINION

If public opinion was an important concern in political sociological theory into the 1960s and 1970s, how and why did it subsequently begin to disappear in more recent decades? Evidence of the shift away from public opinion was first documented more than a decade and a half ago by Burstein (1998a), who reported that virtually none of the published research on policy outcomes appearing in sociology journals in the 1980s and 1990s had included measures of public opinion (just 3 out of 49 published studies he identified). Burstein argued that neglecting to include measures of public opinion potentially created misleading models that exaggerated the impact of interest groups, social movements, or political elites (1998a:43–44). Burstein (1998a) contrasted this neglect in sociology with some studies in the same period published in political science journals that had included public opinion measures. Nearly all these studies found that public opinion was a significant factor behind policy making. Of additional significance, in many of these studies the inclusion of opinion in a model returned lower (or nonsignificant) estimates of the impacts of parties, interest groups, or unions (see Burstein 1998a:41–46).

In the period since Burstein's (1998a) thematic challenge was issued, public opinion analysts working largely outside of sociology have developed important new ways of conceptualizing mass attitudes and analyzing their impact on political outcomes. At the macro level, research on policy responsiveness to

public opinion has leapfrogged early generations of work (e.g., Erikson, MacKeun, and Stimson 2002; see Manza and Cook 2002 for an overview). At the micro level, the rise of experimental designs and powerful new theories of cognitive complexity have also transformed the study of public opinion (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007b; Sniderman and Grob 1996), providing new analytic tools and findings.

In partial contrast to Burstein's (1998a) conclusions for the 1980s and 1990s, there have been a few studies of policy and political change by political sociologists including measures of public opinion in major disciplinary journals and university press monographs (e.g., Brooks and Manza 2007; Gilens 1999; McAdam and Su 2002). Yet on the whole, both the new methodological work and recent empirical applications appear to have done little to dislodge the broad-based consensus among many political sociologists regarding the irrelevance of public opinion. For example, an analysis we conducted of all books reviewed in the political sociology section of *Contemporary Sociology* in the period from 1998 to 2008 found virtually no attention to public opinion or inclusion of any related concept in the books' indexes.

To understand the shift away from public opinion in the theoretical and empirical work of key political sociologists, we consider intellectual developments within the field during this time. The renewal of the field from the 1970s onward involved a decisive theoretical move away from the emphasis on what were frequently seen as micro or cultural factors (such as values, ideologies, voting behavior, and public opinion) in favor of a focus on macro factors such political institutions, revolutions, the consequences of military conflict, social movements, and class-based power resources. This can be read in one of two ways. On one hand, the rejection of public opinion was in part a rejection of Parsonsian functionalism. Beginning with Mills's (1959) dismissal of survey research in *The Sociological Imagination* and the broader rejection of functionalist theories in the 1960s and 1970s, the theoretical move away from anything that smacked of values has to be seen as part of a larger movement in the discipline. Whether this move also represented a firm commitment to the rejection of the possibility that publics could form attitudes and be motivated by dispositions that were even partially independent of broader structural forces is less clear. Either way, it hardly would be surprising to say that the macrostructural orientation in political sociology has been dominant for the past three decades (cf. Steinmetz 1999).

To understand and situate this shift, we turn in the rest of this section to an overview of the influential scholarship of five diverse and influential political sociologists (Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Michael Mann, Gosta Esping-Andersen, and G. William Domhoff) who (along with their collaborators, their students, and the scholarship that followed in their wake) led the move to macrostructural factors. While providing numerous important and valuable insights along the way, the theoretical insights developed by these thinkers also short-circuited the interest in public opinion that was characteristic of midcentury scholarship.

Tilly's Analysis of How Citizens Speak to Their Rulers

The most prolific and wide-ranging political sociologist of the contemporary period is arguably the late Charles Tilly. A key figure in establishing the larger social history movement of the 1960s (see Tilly 1961), Tilly's work (and that of his numerous students and collaborators) expanded the analytical focus of political sociology to consider how social movements and collective action—disruptive politics occurring outside of institutional channels—could become critical sources of political change (see Tilly 1978, 1986; see also McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). In his numerous case studies of collective action in France, Britain, and elsewhere, Tilly developed methods for systematic counts of protest events and analyzing them to identify "repertoires" of action. He also made foundational contributions to the political sociology of the state by developing theoretical models of state formation and development rooted in an analysis of war making and revenue collection (see Tilly 1985, 1990) and the social foundations of democracy (Tilly 2007).

Tilly's work provided, however, a very limited account of the place of public opinion, a significant omission for a body of work that seeks to focus attention on the voices of ordinary people through social movements and other forms of collective behavior. He did, however, once address the question of public opinion (Tilly 1983), arguing that it was through collective action that citizens found ways to express their

opinions to political elites long before polling and other formal ways of measuring public opinion came into existence. While not claiming that opinion polls are irrelevant in the contemporary world, Tilly (1983:477) asserted that "even today we can look to the language of popular collective action as a complement to the knowledge offered us by elections and surveys." But no further account of how the knowledge offered by elections and surveys might matter is provided. This is especially striking given the large number of historical instances in which mass opinion stands at odds with the demands expressed through protests. Yet throughout his vast body of work, there is no further clarification or detailed discussion of the relationship between public opinion as measured in elections and surveys and the public opinion expressed through collective action.

Tilly's contributions to political sociology (and the importance of his neglect of public opinion) were not limited to his work on collective action and his later work on democracy. In his influential scholarship on state formation through war making, Tilly (1985, 1990, 1994) focuses on macrocomparative dynamics in the creation and maintenance of the modern nation-state. At the heart of his account is the role of military capacity in generating state structures and state capacities. A key example is the effects of military conflicts in promoting the development of taxation capacity (see, e.g., Tilly 2007, 2009). Regimes that could not develop these institutional capacities fell behind or would be absorbed by stronger units. Here too, however, public opinion is absent from the account. The possibility that citizens more readily assent to paying higher taxes in wartime is not, for example, engaged as an important piece of the puzzle of why states are able to improve or increase revenue collection in the first place.

Skocpol's Historical Institutionalism

Theda Skocpol's work, alongside that of Tilly, has probably done more than any other both to reinvigorate the field of political sociology from the late 1970s onward and to push it toward macrostructural concerns. At the center of Skocpol's theoretical contributions has been the project of "bringing the state back in," that is, directing attention to the importance of state institutions and state managers in the making of social and political change (see Skocpol 1979, 1980, 1992, 1995; Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol 1988). In her landmark *States and Social Revolutions,* Skocpol (1979) argued that analysts of revolutions had paid insufficient attention to the role of crises in state administrative capacity and state-elite relations in understanding the conditions under which successful revolutions occur. Skocpol insisted that postrevolutionary state building influences the long-run fate of revolutionary breakthroughs. Although peasant consciousness (and peasant revolts) was a necessary condition for successful revolutions in France, Russia, and China, structural features of the prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary state were decisive.

Skocpol's scholarship between 1980 and the late 1990s centered largely on the formation and development of the American welfare state. In particular, Skocpol examined how structural factors, rooted in the organization of democratic political institutions, pushed the American welfare state down paths very different from those of European or even other Anglo-American welfare states. Skocpol and other historical institutionalists identified the constitutional design of governments as a critical factor in accounting for comparative difference, with the U.S. welfare state's being particularly disadvantaged by a number of features of American political institutions that distinguish it from its European counterparts. For example, the United States is characterized by political decentralization, which lowers the likelihood of generous welfare programs. The multiple "veto points" found in American political institutions provide opportunities for business organizations and their conservative political allies to more frequently block egalitarian policy initiatives than occurs in more centralized polities (see Immergut 1992; Skocpol 1995; Swank 2002). Another example can be found in the party system itself, where first-past-the-post electoral rules did not favor the rise of social democratic parties and also created fragmented parties with limited mobilization capacities (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Shefter 1994).

Historical institutionalists have paid special attention to the idea of "path dependency" in understanding policy development (see Hacker 2002; Pierson 1994, 1996, 2000; Skocpol 1992). Formulated as a thesis,

path dependency anticipates that early developments in the history of a policy establish a trajectory or subsequent "path" that, once adopted, is difficult to reverse (see Pierson 2000 for a systematic statement). But why? The key causal mechanism is policy feedback, through which the establishment of a new government policy exerts influence over sources of support and the strategies of actors seeking to shape policy. In elaborating the idea that "policy causes politics," Pierson (1994, 1996, 2000) has argued that constituencies and expectations are created around policies that make them difficult to eliminate once they have been established. Furthermore, new policy ideas and proposals for reform start from the existing policy framework; to be taken seriously, reform proposals must operate from within a field or set of understandings that quickly becomes entrenched. In this way, institutional developments at $time_1$ almost always constrain developments at $time_2$, irrespective of the demands of social movements from below or the activities of elites from above.

Skocpol and other institutionalist scholars have frequently distinguished and defended their causal arguments through simultaneous and vigorous rejections of a possible role for public opinion (often relabeled "cultural values"), or what they see as "behavioralist" approaches (see Heclo 1974:288–93; Immergut 1998; Skocpol 1992:15–23; Steinmo 1994). What are the grounds for this conclusion? First, there are arguments that the hypothesized liberalism of the American political order did not preclude certain kinds of expensive and sometimes even precocious welfare state building in the late nineteenth century (civil war pensions), in the early twentieth century (mother's pensions, worker's compensation), and during the New Deal (e.g., relatively high levels of social spending) (see Amenta 1998; Orloff 1993; Skocpol 1992). In other words, whatever Americans' underlying preferences for social provisions might have been, it is primarily proposals having an affinity with the logic of American institutions and pre-existing policies are most likely to succeed. More generally, the demands for policy change that do emerge are frequently motivated by, or filtered through, an institutional framework favoring some ideas over others. While policy experts and policy ideas (see, e.g., Orloff 1993; Skocpol and Rueschemeyer 1986; Skocpol and Weir 1985), social movements (Amenta 1998, 2006; Clemens 1997), and state managers (Heclo 1974; Skocpol 1995; Skocpol and Finegold 1995) all have a place in the struggle over policy, public opinion itself is discounted as a potential causal force.

Esping-Andersen and the Power Resources Model of Welfare States

Research on, and theorizing about, the rise and consolidation of welfare states in the rich democracies have occasioned some of the most vigorous and far-reaching debates in political sociology in the past 25 years (see Arts and Gliessen 2001; Korpi 2003 for reviews). Although there have been a wide variety of theories proposed to explain the rise of the modern welfare state—including historical institutionalism, discussed above—perhaps the most widely influential model has been the power resources approach. Associated first and foremost with the influential writings of Gosta Esping-Andersen and Walter Korpi, and later with the work of Evelyne Huber and John Stephens, Alexander Hicks, and Duane Swank, power resources analyses begin from the premise that enduring class inequalities facilitate the formation of social groups with distinct and competing interests in relation to government policy (see Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990; Hicks 1999; Huber and Stephens 2001; Korpi 1983, 1989; Stephens 1979; Swank 2002). These classes and groups develop organizational capacities through parties, unions, and interest group organizations. Organizations representing working-class, agrarian, and middle-class interests, working separately and sometimes together, eventually gained enough strength to build welfare states.

How do welfare states evolve? For power resources theory, the structure of class compromise is central. Elections in welfare capitalist democracies provide classes and class-related organizations such as unions with a recurring set of opportunities to extract benefits from national government or to block those reforms that would lead to concessions and relative losses. Class conflict through the ballot box—the "democratic class struggle" in Korpi's (1983) adoption of the Lipset phrase—is thus a central mechanism in the development of welfare states (see also Hicks 1999; Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; and Huber and Stephens

2001). The second set of factors relates to the (varying) strength of unions and corporatist bargaining structures. Here, the capacities of organized groups to project power—even if they do not actually use it, as in the case of strong unions threatening to strike—can influence policy makers.

The key to understanding welfare state outcomes is the development of what Esping-Andersen (1990) famously described as the "decommodification" of labor (in which the welfare or life chances of individuals and classes on labor market activity decline in proportion to the extent of income support programs and public service provision). Differences in the degree of decommodification and the forms through which social provision is provided (targeted versus universalistic), Esping-Andersen (1990) argued, produce a division of the rich democracies into three broad clusters of countries: a "social democratic" cluster in Nordic Europe, a "conservative/Christian democratic" cluster in continental western Europe, and a "liberal democratic" cluster in the Anglo-American democracies. Social democratic welfare states are characterized by high degrees of generosity, universalism in social provision, and a significant degree of labor market decommodification. Christian democratic regimes couple high generosity with targeting aimed at reinforcing traditional gender roles. Liberal regimes have comparatively lower generosity and more extensive labor market commodification. Scholars following in Esping-Andersen's footsteps have long debated the nature of variation in welfare state regimes and whether there are additional ideal types of welfare states (Castles and Mitchell 1993; Kangas 1994; Kersbergen 1999). But the basic framework emphasizing these broad sets of distinctions has been widely and robustly applied in comparative research.

Power resources theory comes perhaps the closest of the theories under consideration to an endorsement of a role for public attitudes in contributing to welfare state making. Critical pathways to each of the three welfare state regime types is evident in the patterning of cross-class coalitions and in the timing and sequencing of these coalitions. Examples of the importance of these coalitions abound. For example, when a highly organized working class is successfully allied with farmers, this tends to facilitate the emergence of welfare states with extensive social provisions, as in the case of Sweden (Korpi 1983). By contrast, when the working class has high levels of regional or racial/ethnic fragmentation that inhibit class alliances, the interests of employers will tend to figure more centrally in regime development, as in the case of the United States (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Furthermore, because they directly benefit from many welfare state programs, middle-class citizens may join with the labor movement and its allies to support generous welfare programs. According to Korpi and Palme (1998), the encompassing scope of public services within Nordic welfare states contributes to higher levels of legitimacy in comparison with regimes organized around means testing (or more limited benefits for middle-class households). Universalistic polities, by reducing zero-sum conflict between welfare recipients and nonrecipients, are expected to secure high levels of both middle-class and working-class support (Rothstein 1998; Svallfors 1995, 1997).

These lines of thinking have clear implications for understanding the underlying nature of welfare states across polities. Yet scholars within the power resources tradition appear generally to be reluctant to bring into focus or empirically buttress these implications with detailed analysis of how mass opinion fits into their larger theoretical account. At best, it leaves public opinion as a residual rather than a central factor in the policy process.

Mann's History of Power

Michael Mann's large-scale, multivolume social history of power offers fresh insights into the central role of what he calls "ideological power," one of four types of power he analyzes across time and space (Mann 1986, 1993). In this sense, Mann's approach to thinking about historical dynamics departs sharply from Tilly's. Perhaps not coincidentally, some of Mann's earliest sociological work directly engaged questions of attitudes and public opinion in liberal democracies and in relation to working-class consciousness (Mann 1970, 1973).

With his turn to large-scale historical analyses of power, Mann embeds both popular and elite consciousness in the "I" of his "IEMP" (ideological, economic, military, political) model of power. Mann

identifies ideological power (and the capacity of ruling authorities to exert "ideological power" and "ideological organization" on governed peoples) as one critical resource of power (see Mann 1993:22–24). Perhaps not surprisingly, given the overall direction of political sociology during this era, Shroeder notes that of the four components of power, "ideological" power is the one that has been the most controversial (2006:6).

Mann's focus in the first volume of his history (through 1760) centers primarily on religious organization and beliefs as a source of elite cohesion and, in many cases, popular consciousness. For example, at the end of a chapter about "the global emergence of civilizations," Mann asserts that "in all cases *ideological power* had a privileged role in solidifying regional organizations. … The religious cultures were socially transcendent, providing organized solutions to problems affecting an area more extensive than existing authoritative institutions could regulate" (1993:126). Elsewhere, ideology and religion play critical roles in the normative integration of state officials spread over large swaths of lands (e.g., Mann 1993:301–25 on Christianity in the later Roman Empire).

While emphasizing the impact of beliefs grounded in religion prior to the nineteenth century, Mann's examination of the dynamics of power turns more explicitly on structural sources of power (economic and political), albeit with some attention to socialism and nationalism as motivating sources of social change through social movements (but not ordinary citizens' opinions). In examining the role of nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mann suggests in places that public attitudes play a key role in promoting the move toward violent conflict culminating in World War I:

> The middle class … identified its own economic, political, and cultural progress with the achievement of national citizenship. It became intensely proud of being "British," "French," "German," etc. … In Germany, Britain, and France, the middle class dominated jingoist, chauvinist, militarist and even racist pressure groups. In the last decades before 1914, states found themselves confronted by a new problem. When boxed into geo-political crises, they were urged on to further aggression by this middle class "public opinion." (Mann 1988:156)

Elsewhere Mann argues that modern states—especially the United States—have become militarized in ways that create what he calls "spectator-sport militarism," with the masses capable of being mobilized for war making by manipulative elites (Mann 1988: 183-186). Mann's analysis thus captures the well-known propensity of publics to support military interventions, at least in their early stages.

But his more recent analysis of the Geoge W. Bush administration's war on terror and imperial ambitions seems largely to neglect the flip side of public opinion as a constraint, for instance, or the possibility that growing public opposition to the war (and not imperial overreach) undermined some of the initial long-range goals of the administration. That is precisely the expectation of the famous "rally round the flag" model of public opinion during wartime (Mueller 1994, 2005), one that Mann himself has embraced (see Mann 2004:101–104). Understanding the social and ideological forces relating to military adventures in the modern world is substantially enhanced by, and hardly can proceed without, more detailed investigation into the interrelationships between opinion formation and military policies and campaigns.

Domhoff's Class-dominance Synthesis

The final influential theory in political sociology that we consider is the "power elite" model of American politics, especially as developed by G. William Domhoff (1967, 1990, 2006; see also Gordon 1994, 2004; Quadagno 1988).[4] The core ideas of the power elite model—the role of common backgrounds and network linkages among the upper class, the corporate community, and policy-planning organizations and the disproportionate influence of the members of this core group over policy and politics—have been brought together into a multidimensional model of power and its reproduction in the United States in Domhoff's various writings.

Analysis of the role of business interests in the development of social policy has been a fertile and wide-ranging area of empirical research. Studies of the origins of the Social Security Act (Domhoff 1996; Gordon 1994; Klein 2000; Quadagno 1988) and the repeated failures of proposals for national health insurance (Gordon 2004) are representative examples. While emphasizing different groups and/or timing and sequencing, business-centered interpretations of social policy making attribute welfare state innovation to the perennial influence of important segments of the business community (or, in the case of national health insurance, the failure to craft a policy approach capable of bringing important business groups behind it). These accounts provide notably little connection to mass policy attitudes. The adoption of a comparatively limited social safety net in the United States, for example, is traced not to Americans' long-standing unwillingness to support more universal and generous programs (see Newman and Jacobs 2010) or to activists' capacity to mobilize such latent opposition. Instead, the political alignments of state and business in the earlier formation of US social policy as such are key.

Domhoff's scholarship has, however, pushed much harder in exploring (if ultimately rejecting) the possible impact of public opinion than most other political sociological scholarship. He has taken seriously the challenge of unpacking how dominant actors seek to shape and influence public attitudes (see also Ginsburg 1986; Mills 1956; Parenti 1995). Domhoff argues that on policy issues of central importance to the power elite—taxes, governmental regulation of economic activity, spending on social provision—there are a variety of elaborate and well-funded "opinion-formation" activities that elites pursue in an attempt to shape and control public preferences. These include "public relations" and "public affairs" initiatives and efforts to influence the mass media both directly (through corporate ownership) and indirectly (through support for think tanks and idea promotion and the publication of op-eds and policy advertisements) (see Domhoff 2006). Domhoff also has focused novel attention on the dissemination role of "policy discussion groups," settings where middle-class professionals meet to discuss policy questions with opinion leaders (2006: 90-97).

Taken as a whole, such efforts provide startling evidence of attempts to manipulate public opinion and by implication the idea that public opinion must be important enough to try to manipulate in the first place. Indeed, the paradox of Domhoff's (1990, 2006) analysis of elite attempts to remake public opinion is the implication that in the absence of such efforts, public opinion might propel government policy in a different direction. But the actual consequences of elites' opinion-shaping efforts are themselves not well documented. Domhoff's (1967, 1998, 2006) classic *Who Rules America?* has (across multiple editions) left entirely unexamined the actual degree to which mass opinion can be, and was in fact, altered by even the most expensive and well-orchestrated corporate campaigns.

This vagueness is striking given that a large social science literature suggests the considerable difficulty of moving public opinion on any salient issue, especially in directions that are substantially at odds with baseline opinions (Brooks and Manza 2007; Page and Shapiro 1992). To be sure, Domhoff and others have noted the capacity of political elites to achieve short-term framing effects and/or changes in salience in situations such as proposals for national health insurance in the United States (cf. Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). But such stories of successful corporate influence may be rarer than Domhoff's model would suggest. Indeed, counterframing by policy challengers in most cases appears at times sufficient to leave mass opinion relatively intact (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 2007b). This research suggests that in the absence of truly one-sided information flows (as, e.g., in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11), counterframes can push aggregate opinion back to the baseline (Chong and Druckman 2007a).

Understanding the Analytical Move Away from Public Opinion

The structural turn in political sociology, combined with a renewed attention to social movements from below, fit in two ways with a larger movement within sociology away from the functionalist approaches of the 1950s. Once public opinion was cast as a variant of "national values," it could be easily read (mistakenly) as part of the functionalist canon (cf. Mills 1959). Some leading public opinion scholarship contributed to such a reading. For example, in their major and widely cited 1967 essay on social cleavages in

voting behavior, Lipset and Rokkan embraced a systems and functionalist logic to understand how national and industrial revolutions produced remarkably "stable" class-based political alignments (said to be "frozen" since the 1920s). While their timing could not have been worse (on the eve of a major global thaw), the bigger problem with the Lipset and Rokkan (1967) thesis, and other models of public opinion that emphasized shared "values," was that it ran directly counter to the impulses of the 1960s generation of scholars (cf. Sica and Turner 2005).

Because research on public opinion, at least as construed in some versions of 1950s/1960s sociology, seemingly had an elective affinity with the functionalist paradigm, it was a small step to abandonment by a younger generation of scholars promoting alternative and radical theories within the discipline from the 1960s onward (cf. McAdam 2007). Burgeoning interest in, and scholarly optimism toward, the civil rights, New Left, and women's movements was a powerful lever for viewing dynamism and dissent in this new era as poorly captured by static conceptions of social order (e.g., Gamson [1975] 1990; Gitlin [1980] 2003; Piven and Cloward 1978). Closely informed by the growing influence of comparative/historical and macro-oriented work, a successive generation of scholars found deep and largely a priori fault with theory and research on public opinion (Eliasoph 1998; Ginsberg 1986; Immergut 1998).

HOW POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY BENEFITS FROM REENGAGING PUBLIC OPINION: AN IMMANENT CRITIQUE

The previous section described the neglect of public opinion across major theoretical traditions in political sociology. In this section, we return to the same bodies of work. We do so to suggest that in spite of their neglect or outright rejection of public opinion, a careful rereading of this scholarship suggests it ultimately invites, at times even compels, a public opinion analysis to complement or complete core insights. We provide, in other words, an immanent critique of contemporary political sociology in reference to the problem of public opinion.[5]

Bringing All the Citizens In

Among the most lasting legacies of Tilly's varied body of work has been reexamination of the sources and consequences of collective action and how these reflect the underlying opinions of ordinary citizens who are not part of the governing elite. But even though Tilly never considers public opinion (directly or indirectly), there are places where Tilly hints at, or implicitly assumes, a degree of relevance. Consider his landmark theoretical book on social movements, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Tilly 1978). Here, Tilly develops a political conflict model of collective action in which movements arise not out of grievances or explosions of frustration (as in the classical collective action literature such as Smelser 1963) but where there are resources (organizational and political) for challengers to draw on in seeking to mobilize supporters. (This issue frequently arises in the context of formal models of collective behavior as well; see, e.g., Baldassarri 2009.)

While it is mobilization rather than grievance that is the explicit focus of his work, Tilly's organizational model does require (or assume) the existence of some degree of citizen grievances for mobilization to take place (as we suggested in the case of the tax revolt studies discussed in the previous section). But where do these grievances come from? In expanding beyond Tilly's initial organizational model, subsequent work has probed the ways in which social movements both take advantage of and seek to reshape or extend popular grievances through "framing" processes (see McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Snow and Benford 1988).

Social movements develop frames that at times draw on existing grievances and attitudes. When communicated successfully to audiences, they raise the likelihood that individuals will tend to connect these prior dispositions and experiences to broader struggles or organizations. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., for example, did not have an impact simply because of effective mobilization or organizational

resources; King also masterfully employed rhetorics of equal opportunity and human rights that brought individuals and groups into the movement and changed the salience of civil rights issues for northern whites (Burstein 1998b; McAdam 1996). In turn, this expanded the movement's resource base and strategically reoriented the alignment of a number of government officials and other elites (Morris 1985).

Following in Tilly's footsteps, analysts of social movements also have grappled with questions about how, when, and why social movements have success. One important way that protests or social movements matter is their influence in the making of public policy. The pathways of influence may be direct (politicians changing their policy stances in the face of civil unrest) as well as indirect (through a movement's impact on elections, media coverage and frames, public opinion) or even entail cultural tastes and trends (Burstein 1999; Gitlin 1987). The empirical question then becomes how to measure and assess the degree and type of movement impacts. Public opinion is one key pathway through which such framing impacts occur (cf. McAdam and Su 2002).

Consider another example. Tilly's model of democracy, as we noted, shifts attention to noninstitutional sources of democratic practice or consolidation such as trust, equality, and the reigning in of powerful forces capable of undermining democracy. But as his model does so, Tilly tends to move away from topics having connections to public opinion and electoral politics, ones seen as important by an earlier generation of political scholars (universal suffrage, a free press, elections, and the operation and popular dynamics of political parties). If we seek, however, to fully assess democratic performance without making a priori assumptions about which factors matter (and which don't), some consideration of policy responsiveness to public opinion is also appropriate and ultimately necessary. Do citizens get the policies they want? And when citizens disagree substantially (or diverge from the endorsements of social movements) on specific policy issues, whose preferences ultimately register with politicians? This suggests an important, positive research agenda, one that can be carried out in conjunction with, or otherwise complementing, a focus on noninstitutional sources of democratic performance and legitimacy.

Rethinking the Logic of Path Dependence in Historical Institutionalism

Turning to the model of historical institutionalism in the work of Skocpol and later analysts such as Pierson and Hacker, we also see strong possibilities for expanding the analytical reach to engage public opinion. Historical institutionalists have often argued that the structure of political institutions creates a distinct set of opportunities for policy entrepreneurs. But these same institutions or policies shape the views of the mass public and in certain cases themselves evolve in response to public opinion. As policy moves down a particular path, it can take on institutional momentum in part through the accumulation of high levels of public support over time (cf. Brooks and Manza 2007; Campbell 2005). Policy feedback can occur because of such opinion dynamics.

In the scholarly literature on welfare states, there exist plenty of examples of public support for programs as they develop becoming a critical source (alongside key interest groups) of pressure to maintain policy provisions. For example, the social security program in the United States survived the George W. Bush administration's vigorous plans for privatization in part because powerful interest groups such as the AARP (formerly American Association of Retired Persons) and unions opposed it. But interest group opposition to the plan also drew strength from the fact the plan was deeply unpopular with the U.S. public (Cook and DeSantis 2008). Interest group mobilization in this case appeared to convey meaningful information to members of Congress about mass preferences and the generally high salience of the issue to politicians. Public opinion can play a role in this process because, as Pierson (1996:176) has argued, "politicians are likely to pursue strategies that will not damage their chances for reelection."[6]

This is not the end of the story. The influence of institutions on political outcomes can, and in some cases should, be supplemented by theoretical models that pay attention to how public opinion itself can interact with or shape institutions. An instructive example can be seen in the emphasis that political sociologists have often assigned to the overarching powers of the American legal system. The fact that federal

courts can and often do overturn legislation or engage in policy making from the bench is an important aspect of the American political system. But scholars who examine changes in Supreme Court rulings find that the Court is in some contexts responsive to public opinion (Erikson et al. 2002; Friedman 2009). These two types of processes coexist and are necessary elements of a full understanding of the politics of law (cf. Fourcade 2011 for a parallel argument in a French-American comparison).

A similar lesson can be discerned with respect to the question of why decentralization matters so much, a point Skocpol and many other historical institutionalists have emphasized. Garland's (2010) institutional analysis of the persistence of the death penalty and Lieberman's (1998) analysis of the limited welfare state in the United States both demonstrate how institutional fragmentation and multiple veto points make it possible for public preferences in local contexts to matter so much. For example, Garland shows that it is mostly southern states (with high levels of public support for the death penalty) that continue to execute, while in much of the rest of the country (where support for the death penalty is far more limited), states rarely if ever employ it. This interaction between institutional context and mass opinion highlights how institutional analysis alone can be usefully supplemented by analysis of public opinion.

Extending Mann's Model of Ideological Power

Michael Mann's historical sociology, as we noted above, steps at times toward an embrace of popular as well as elite beliefs in understanding the dynamics of social power in his notion of extensive ideological power. Yet Mann's main focus is on the ideologies of elites across his many cases. To be sure, the lack of good sources of data about mass opinion hinders systematic analysis, but nothing in his theoretical model would preclude taking mass attitudes into account.

Consider, for instance, Mann's analysis of religion as a source of ideological power. Religion becomes a source of social power when it unifies elites. In a commentary on Mann's work, Gorski (2006:111) notes that while Mann's focus on religion as a key source of early state building advances on militarization models of state formation (cf. Tilly 1990), he does not further extend the analysis of religion to thinking about variation in state capacities to pacify citizens and win consent to state policy. Gorski's (1993, 2003) own historical work provides a significant demonstration of how popular consciousness before the era of modern democratic politics can be examined and theorized. Gorski argues that even before extensive state authority and bureaucratization of state organizations were established, nonauthoritarian governance could be fostered where mass identity with Calvinist religious traditions was present. The Dutch Republic was a successful entrepreneur in establishing modern state institutions in part because the religious beliefs associated with the Calvinist tradition aligned with styles of collective discipline—these would include communal surveillance, respect for legal authority, and bureaucratic state building. These powerfully yoked mass and elite were on a common pathway toward constitutional government that was not found elsewhere to the same degree.

Building on similar themes, Kahl (2005) provides an even more expansive examination of how religious beliefs shape different paths toward poor relief during a 500-year period. Kahl (2005) argues that the three dominant religious traditions in western Europe and North America—Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Reform Protestantism—gave rise to distinctive mass and elite models of justifications and policies for poor relief. Kahl argues that these models, although emerging before mass opinion could be systematically measured, have produced enduring patterns of difference that can be traced up to the present. The influence is felt throughout the political order, and she argues that variations in state policy can be traced, in part, back to founding religious traditions.

Public Opinion as a Power Resource

In the case of power resources theory, analytical attention to mass opinion fits, we believe, remarkably well within the theoretical premises of the model, waiting only to be more substantially engaged by practitioners. The question raised by the power resources model's insistence on the importance of class alliances or

the role of Left parties is, Which factors enable those alliances (and resulting Left party electoral successes) in the first place? Focusing on class resources—such as the size of the industrial working class and its political mobilization in the party system—ultimately brings us to the question of how welfare states have endured in the face of globalization pressure and the declining organizational strength of labor unions in virtually all capitalist democracies (Wallerstein and Western 2000). The most likely answer to this puzzle of persistence is that generous welfare states, once established, win mass popular support. For instance, because they directly benefit from many welfare state programs, middle-class citizens may join with the labor movement and its working-class members to support the maintenance of welfare programs. Universalistic policies, by reducing zero-sum conflict between welfare recipients and nonrecipients, secure high levels of both middle-class and working-class support (Korpi and Palme 1998; Rothstein 1998; Svallfors 1995, 1997).

Within the power resources tradition, analysts have yet to employ the language of contemporary political psychology and opinion research, but clear hints of a role for mass opinion as a source of policy persistence can be found in a number of recent statements. For example, Huber and Stephens (2001:3) propose that mass opinion may operate as a "ratchet," whereby "the rapid growth of support for welfare state policies … that benefit a large portion of the population … then turns these policies into the new point of reference for discussions on further welfare state development." Korpi (2003:598) likewise suggests that "it can be argued that major welfare-state institutions are likely to be of relevance for the formation of values, attitudes, and interest among citizens in ways that are of relevance for patterns of collective action." Power resources theorists have also sometimes given an explicit role for public opinion in protecting existing levels of social provision from significant cutbacks (see, e.g., Esping-Andersen 2000:4; Huber and Stephens 2001:322). There are additional and fuller opportunities for extension and integration.

Corporate Power and Public Opinion

Finally, what of the power elite/class dominance model? We have already noted that the importance of shaping public opinion to powerful actors (something Domhoff has empirically documented they undertake at considerable expense) implies that at some level public opinion matters. Put another way, it would be irrational for corporations, parties, and other elite organizations to expend resources in attempts to influence public attitudes unless those attitudes do, in fact, affect election outcomes and public policy.

Furthermore, by placing elections and public opinion at the center of struggles over public policy, Domhoff's recent formulations of his "class dominance" model productively place political sociology firmly into a dialogue with opinion research and empirical democratic theory (see, e.g., Domhoff 2006). His research on the role of the political money in American elections calls attention to one important set of factors, but it would be implausible (and in conflict with virtually all research on the question) to assert that public opinion does not also influence election outcomes. Any serious account of the policy impact of public opinion would likely test for both direct and indirect paths of influence, the latter through the influence of opinion on election outcomes (cf. Erikson et al. 2002). Paying serious attention to elections calls out for some further analysis of public opinion, where money and mass opinion are simultaneously taken into account (cf. Smith 2000).

The influence of elite attempts at framing and shaping mass opinion is, we would emphasize, very much a question amenable to sustained empirical research. It has been separately explored in political-psychological literatures on framing, priming, and persuasion (cf. Chong and Druckman 2007b). Likewise, the contentious claim that elections don't matter has also been subjected to careful empirical work, and there is good evidence that even in the United States, Democratic control of the White House is associated with reduced inequality and greater income gains for moderate-income households (e.g., Bartels 2008; Kelly 2009). Such results are notably consistent with comparative scholarship on the political economy of partisan governance (Huber and Stephens 2001), where the degree to which Left, Right, or religious party coalitions dominate parliaments influences policy outputs and the distribution of income and services in a nation.

A NOTE ON SOME RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

As a coda to our discussion of the five dominant theoretical traditions in political sociology, we would be remiss in failing to mention a small body of new work that suggests at least the beginnings of a resurgence of interest in public opinion. This research is far from being integrated into a coherent theoretical paradigm (existing or new), and for the most part it has been conducted independently of the major analytical traditions discussed above. But it is notable that when sociologists studying the political world have allowed for the possibility of an impact of public opinion, they frequently find it in empirical work that poses questions for the broader theoretical ideas of the field.

Burstein (1998a) was the first to pose the problem, and in more recent work he has introduced new questions regarding opinion impacts on policy. One paper (Burstein 2006) explored the issue of whether the impact of public opinion on policy may sometimes be exaggerated because analysts consider only cases in which public opinion is relatively well measured in repeated surveys. For example, for many issues that the U.S. Congress considers during a given session, there is either no or few public opinion data available, creating a risk of Type I errors. Burstein and Linton (2002) also examined the mediation of political party and interest group organizations on policy making. They found that impacts of the latter factors are dramatically reduced when public opinion is controlled.

Taking up Burstein's various challenges to study public opinion and policy linkages, several social movement scholars have shown a productive way forward. In their study of the impact of the Townsend movement on public pensions and old age assistance, Amenta, Caren, and Olasky (2005) included a measure of public opinion at the state level, finding subsequent estimates to provide evidence of significant policy influence of opinion net of the size of the Townsend organization in a given state. It should be emphasized that this inclusion of a measure of state-level public opinion did not eliminate significant social movement impacts or require the authors to abandon a broader institutional politics model that has important affinities with historical institutionalism.

The possibility of a complementary interrelationship between social movements and public opinion also has been explored productively by McAdam and Su (2002). Examining the impact of the anti–Vietnam war protests, they developed a sequence model in which public opinion serves as the mediator between movements and policy (cf. Agnone 2007). Soule and King (2006) consider stages in the ratification of the U.S. Equal Rights Amendment (see also Soule and Olzak 2004). At early stages of the policy conflict, Soule and King (2006) find that the movement for the Equal Rights Amendment had strong direct effects on state-level passage of the proposed constitutional amendment. But at later stages, mass opinion emerged as a critical source of constraint. Viewed in this way, public opinion may be less relevant to the initial agenda-setting stage of policy conflicts but more important as a constraint on the later contours of policy output and law.

Some recent work on comparative welfare states (Brooks and Manza 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Mau and Veghte 2007) outlines another way of considering linkages between opinion and policy. In this work, there is evidence that mass opinion helps to explain the existence of higher levels of welfare spending in the Nordic region (and in much of western Europe) in comparison to the English-speaking democracies. Further evidence from this work suggests that temporally stable aggregate preferences appear to have operated as a significant barrier against forces of welfare state retrenchment from the 1990s onward.

It is important to note, however, that not all of the recent political sociological work considering opinion impacts on policy finds positive effects. We would hardly expect otherwise. For example, in his study of the political sources of the rise of mass incarceration, Western (2006) finds no impact of state-level liberal-conservative ideology on state incarceration rates (see also Greenberg and West 2001). In this case, it is possible that public opinion is simply irrelevant. It is also possible that public attitudes toward crime are channeled through Republican control of state government, suggesting a weaker, indirect path for public opinion (Jacobs and Helms 1996; see also Chen 2007 for a similar finding with respect to state adoption of fair employment legislation). Either way, questions of the impact of public opinion on policy or political

change benefit by careful empirical tests. In general, we would also expect there will be plenty of cases in which what the public wants has limited bearing on political and policy outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This article has two central objectives. Our first goal was to understand how sociology lost public opinion. Our second was to document that even when dismissing public opinion as a significant factor in social and political life, influential political sociological theorists nevertheless employ related concepts to understand political processes and outcomes. If the logic of our argument is correct, the study of public attitudes—in their full complexity, across contexts, and over time—should be viewed as relevant to scholarship on political process and political change and possibly also as a topic worthy of study in its own right.

Our positive case ultimately rests on two distinct claims. First, careful research on a wide range of political topics will tend to find that public opinion, whether measured through surveys and polls or not, is often an important factor motivating political action, translating the effects of other factors, or shaping political outcomes themselves. In this sense, ignoring mass opinion potentially risks incomplete portraits. Methodological and theoretical advances in other disciplines during the past 15 years, largely unknown to many sociologists, immensely strengthen the case for opinion impacts. These developments allow for theoretical sophistication, taking us beyond the vaguer notions of national values that plagued the earlier generation of scholarship that sought to treat public opinion as a causally inclusive and perhaps sprawling base for scholarship. Public opinion is properly viewed as a set of mechanisms that are often specific to context and also capable of considerable modifications or activation across contexts. This is preferable to a view that equates it with an essentially fixed feature of nations.

Second, including public opinion in our models and theories of political change does not mean jettisoning other factors or abandoning the insights of existing theories. The research examples we have brought together in this article leave ample room to integrate public opinion alongside other salient mechanisms and processes. Moving this work forward, such a program would be eminently consistent with the discipline's commitments to understanding the sources of social and political inequality. We believe that bringing the interdisciplinary tools of mass opinion research to the task has the potential to enrich political sociology in ways that can be only beneficial to scholarship.

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NOTES

1. Berberoglu (2002), Best (2002), Faulks (2000), McAuley (2003), and Nash (2007) provide few or no significant mentions or analyses. Orum and Dale (2008) provide only indirect analysis through discussions of civil society, political parties, and the media, while Kloby (2004) treats public opinion directly but largely as a manifestation of political manipulation as part of the "ideology process." Neuman (2004), by contrast, seeks to integrate an analysis of public opinion as both an independent and a dependent variable.

2. Two recent handbooks of cultural sociology (Alexander, Jacobs, and Smith 2011; Hall, Grindstaff, and Lo 2010) contain no chapters about public opinion. While there are important, if contested, points of relevance between culture scholarship and social psychology (cf. DiMaggio 1997; Vaisey 2009), we postpone consideration of this issue (and the linkage to public opinion scholarship) to another context.

3. Weber's insights about the role of ideas in history—such as in his famous "switchman" metaphor presented in *Economy and Society* (Weber [1920] 1978)—also implies a place for opinion-formation processes through elite interventions at key historical turning points (Weber [1915] 1958:280). Yet the mechanisms through which ideas might play such a dramatic role are left open.

4. There is a long history of scholarship focusing on elite influence in American politics that Domhoff and others have carried forward into contemporary sociology. Mills (1956) was a classic of an earlier generation, as were the writings of historians Gabriel Kolko (1977) and Martin Sklar (1988).

5. Immanent critique is a type of critical theory, associated originally with Hegel and Marx, that situates analysis of existing theory "from within," seeking to show how a theory contains the seeds of its own limitation and necessary transcendence (cf. Antonio 1981).

6. It is striking to note that in Skocpol's detailed examination of a recent policy controversy—President Bill Clinton's failed proposals for a national health plan in 1993–1994—public opinion (and the struggles of key actors to frame proposals and shape public preferences) plays a significant role. Other institutionalist accounts of the defeat of the Clinton health plan have paid attention to the role of public opinion and the struggle of various groups to influence it in accounting for the defeat of the plan (Hacker 1997; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). By contrast, class-based accounts of the defeat of proposals for national health insurance have typically paid much less attention to the role of public opinion (e.g., Gordon 2004; Quadagno 2005; Swenson and Greer 2002).

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