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Has Polling Enhanced Representation? Unearthing Evidence from the Literary Digest Issue Polls

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How has representation changed over time in the United States? Has responsiveness to public opinion waxed or waned among elected officials? What are the causes of such trends as we observe? Scholars have pursued these crucial questions in different ways. Some explore earlier eras in search of the "electoral connection", i.e. the extent to which voters held office-holders accountable for their actions and the degree to which electoral concerns motivated politicians' behavior.[1] Others explore the effects of institutional changes such as the move to direct election of senators or the "reapportionment revolution."[2]

Institutional reforms are not, however, the only factors that can affect representation; technological change can also play a significant role. In fact, some scholars contend that the rise of scientific surveys since the 1930s has yielded more responsive government. According to this school of thought, polls provide recent cohorts of elected officials more accurate assessments of public opinion than their predecessors enjoyed, which allows them to reflect their constituents' views to a greater extent than the politicians of yesteryear. Yet others doubt whether politicians were truly ignorant of public sentiment before the rise of the poll; nor is there much certainty regarding the level of current politicians' understanding of constituent opinion. Some also question whether ignorance is at the root of elected officials' frequent divergence from their constituents' wishes.

In order to advance this debate, we need to learn more about public opinion and representation in the era before scientific surveys. Many scholars have offered empirical explorations of representation, typically focusing on members of Congress. While Warren Miller and Donald Stokes' classic 1963

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1. David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); William T. Bianco, David B. Spence, and John D. Wilkerson, "The Electoral Connection in the Early Congress: The Case of the Compensation Act of 1816," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 145–71; Jamie L. Carson and Erik J. Engstrom, "Assessing the Electoral Connection: Evidence from the Early United States." *American Journal of Political Science.* 49 (2005): 746–57; Jeffery A. Jenkins and Brian R. Sala, "The Spatial Theory of Voting and the Presidential Election of 1824," *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (1998): 1157–79; Elaine K. Swift, "The Electoral Connection Meets the Past-Lessons from Congressional History, 1789–1899," *Political Science Quarterly* 102 (1987): 625–45; Sean M. Theriault, *The Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention and Voter Retribution*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

2. William Bernhard and Brian R. Sala, "The Remaking of an American Senate: The 17th Amendment and Ideological Responsiveness," *Journal of Politics* 68 (2006): 345–57; Sarah Brandes Crook and John R. Hibbing, "A Not-So Distant Mirror: the 17th Amendment and Congressional Change," *American Political Science Review* 91 (1997): 845–53; Ronald F. King and Susan Ellis, "Partisan Advantage and Constitutional Change: The Case of the Seventeeth Amendment." *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996): 69–102; Wendy J. Schiller, "Building Careers and Courting Constituents: U.S. Senate Representation 1889–1924," *Studies in American Political Development* 20 (2006): 185–97; Daniel Wirls, "Regionalism, Rotten Boroughs, Race, and Realignment: The Seventeenth Amendment and the Politics of Representation," *Studies in American Political Development* 13 (1999): 1–30; Gary W. Cox and Jonathan N. Katz, *Elbridge Gerry's Salamander*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Stephen Ansolabehere, Alan Gerber, and James M. Snyder, "Equal Votes, Equal Money: Court-Ordered Redistricting and Public Expenditures in the American States," *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002): 767–77.

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article "Constituency Influence in Congress" is the canonical citation, hundreds could be added to the list.[3] Unfortunately, data constraints have limited the scope of inquiry as few surveys yield usable samples of all states or districts. Exceptions, such as the NES Senate Election Study are rare and recent. As a result, most studies of "dyadic representation" are cross-sectional and contemporary in focus.

In this article, I will analyze data that permit comparisons of senators' votes and their constituents' views in the period before scientific surveys were in use the Literary Digest Polls. While best known for its election forecasts, the Digest also polled on a variety of issues. Admittedly, the Digest Polls' biases are infamous. Yet—when used properly, these surveys can enrich our understanding of representation and the effect of polling. Using Digest Poll data, my analyses reveal considerable continuity in the strength of representational linkages from the era before Gallup to our own time. Thus, my findings suggest that the rise of polling has *not* led to an increase in congressional responsiveness to public opinion.

THEORY

Scholars have long held that legislators' votes reflect constituents' views, but only to a modest extent. In their classic article, Miller and Stokes found that the association between the voting records of U.S. Representatives and the attitudes of their constituents during the 85th Congress (1957–1958) varied notably in strength across issues; however, in no case did district opinion ever explain much more than one-third of the variance in scales constructed from members' voting records.[4] Aspects of Miller and Stokes' work were challenged, yet numerous subsequent studies based on more recent observations confirm their core finding of a real, but still weak and uneven association between constituents' views and members' votes.[5]

Moving beyond cross-sectional analysis, scholars have sought to explain changes in representation. Some contend that polls foster responsiveness by giving recent cohorts of elected officials a better grasp of public opinion than their predecessors enjoyed.[6] The leading advocate of this thesis, John Geer, contends that politicians have *always* attempted to win popularity by adopting popular stands, at least on "salient" issues. In the era before scientific surveys, however, it was not always easy for officials to discern majority sentiment among their constituents. As such, even those who sought to be responsive might have often missed the mark.[7] As Geer notes, "With the uncertainty of the measures available prior to polls, predispositions surely influenced the interpretation of the 'data'." With the advent of polls however, "there is less room for rationalization", he maintains.[8] Politicians have a better understanding of public opinion and are more responsive to it as a result. Others have made similar arguments. Philip Converse summarizes one common view:

> With objective data on sentiments absent, it seems likely that partisan representatives could wishfully think such sentiments to be quite different than they are. Holding the will to represent constant between periods, gains in accuracy could only help the fit.[9]

The claim that polls would increase responsiveness on the part of elected officials is hardly new. For example, during the infancy of modern survey research, Claude Robinson contended,

3. Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *American Political Science Review* 57 (1963): 45–56.

4. Ibid.

5. For challenges, see Christopher H. Achen, "Measuring Representation," *American Journal of Political Science* 22 (1978): 475–510; and Robert S. Erikson, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Behavior: A Reexamination of the Miller-Stokes Representation Data," *American Journal of Political Science* 22 (1978): 511–35. For more recent affirmations, see Stephen Ansolabehere, James M. Snyder, and Charles Stewart III, "Candidate Positioning in U.S. House Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (2001): 136–59; Lynda W. Powell, "Issue Representation in Congress," *Journal of Politics* 44 (1982): 658–78; Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, Paul W. Gronke, and Robert M. Rosenberg, "Constituency, Party and Representation in Congress," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 48 (1984): 741–56; Eric M. Uslaner, *The Movers and the Shirkers: Representatives and Ideologues in the U.S. Senate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); and Joshua D. Clinton, "Representation in Congress: Constituents and Roll-calls in the 106th House," *Journal of Politics* 68 (2006): 397–409.

6. See Jeff Manza and Fay Lomax Cook, "A Democratic Polity? Three Views of Policy Responsiveness in the United States," *American Politics Research* 20 (2002): 630–67 for a thorough review of this debate. For Paul Quirk and Joseph Hinchliffe, polls are the tools politicians use to react to an increasingly demanding electorate and not the only causes of the increasing role of public opinion (Quirk and Hinchliffe, "The Rising Hegemony of Mass Opinion," *Journal of Policy History* 10 [1998]: 19–50). See also, John G. Geer, "Critical Realignments and the Public Opinion Poll," *Journal of Politics* 48 (1991): 434–53; Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Geer and Prateek Goorha, "Declining Uncertainty: Presidents, Public Opinion and Polls," in *Uncertainty in American Politics*, ed. Barry C. Burden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lawrence R. Jacobs, *The Health of Nations: Public Opinion and the Making of American and British Health Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Robert Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion: The Case Against "Heeding the Voice of the People"* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002).

7. Of course elected officials may reflect the views of their constituents without making a conscious effort to do so if voters elect candidates who share their convictions. Representation in many cases stems from selection in this sense, rather than elected individuals deferring to public opinion.

8. Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls*, 54.

9. Philip E. Converse, "The Advent of Polling and Political Representation," *P.S.: Political Science & Politics* 29 (1996): 651.

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> the returns from 'issue polls' must necessarily exercise great influence on elected officials, for a democracy operates by majority rule. If an official believes that the majority is wrong, then the straw poll has at least informed him of the need for educating more people to his point of view. Failing this, the opposition will win at the next election and the majority view, whether for good or ill, will dominate governmental policy. By indicating the wishes of the majority the sampling referendum thus becomes an effective instrument of democracy.[10]

George Gallup himself made similar claims, noting that surveys "give the people more power in government" by revealing their sentiments with far greater clarity and speed than elections ever could.[11] Arguing against the fear that polls would turn elected officials into "puppets," Gallup argued:

> Before the days of sampling referenda, legislators were not isolated from their constituencies. They read the local newspapers; they toured their bailiwicks and talked with the man in the street; they received letters from back home; they entertained delegations claiming to be spokesmen for the majority or large and important blocs of voters. The only change that is brought about by sampling referenda is that a technique is provided whereby the legislator will get a truer measure of public opinion than he has had in the past.[12]

Of course polls do not create responsiveness unless they are used. While the Gallup Poll became prominent during the 1936 presidential election, scholars report that as late as the early 1950s, only a handful of mostly younger members of Congress used surveys.[13] Even presidential interest in polling was episodic at best until the 1960s.[14] However, by the 1980s, polling was widespread in congressional campaigns.[15] Geer notes that, "as the older generation of politicians has faded, more and more (younger) politicians have accepted polls as reliable and valid indicators of opinion."[16] Two conditions are now in place that might be expected to lead to greater responsiveness to public opinion on the part of elected officials: polls are widely available and politicians have become comfortable using them.

Yet even if polls have enriched politicians' understanding of public opinion, there are reasons to doubt that they have truly increased responsiveness as their originators promised and as some recent observers contend. One is the issue of *how* officials use surveys. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro claim that politicians use polls (and focus groups) to learn how to manipulate voters with "crafted talk."[17] If elected officials use surveys chiefly to learn how to market positions that they have already chosen without regard to the public's wishes, there should be no increase, and perhaps even a decline in responsiveness as poll usage increases. Indeed, these authors argue that this is what has occurred since the 1970s.

In addition, as V. O. Key noted, electorally-minded politicians are less concerned with the current distribution of views that polls reveal than "latent opinion," that is, the net gain or loss in votes a position taken or policy embarked upon will yield at the next election.[18] Unfortunately, estimating that statistic has proven difficult, as explanations of parties and candidates' shifting fortunes are often disputed well after the last vote has been counted. The existence of surveys, including exit polls, usually does not forestall controversy over the "meaning" of a given electoral result and the nature of any alleged "mandate."[19]

Many members of Congress have policy preferences of their own, which polling information does not dissuade them from promoting. Moreover, even when they view an issue solely through an electoral lens, legislators still must weigh the wishes of the majority against the preferences of the primary electorate, party activists, congressional leaders and lobbies. Members of Congress cannot always adopt a position that pleases all these groups, and polls can offer them only limited guidance in navigating the inevitable trade-offs. In certain cases, for example, it might be wise for a legislator to side with an intense minority rather than an apathetic majority. However, polls are a poor tool for measuring preference intensity or signaling to legislators just how far they can go in catering to an intense minority before generating a backlash from the broader public. In practice,

10. Claude E. Robinson, "Recent Developments in the Straw-Poll Field–Part 2," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1 (1937): 42–52.

11. George Gallup, "Government and the Sampling Referendum," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 33 (1938): 141.

12. Ibid., 141

13. Carl Hawver, "The Congressman and His Public Opinion Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 18 (1954) 123–29; Susan Herbst, *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

14. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59 (1995): 163–95.

15. M. Margaret Conway, "The Use of Polls in Congressional, State and Local Elections," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 472 (1984): 97–105.

16. Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls*, 55.

17. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

18. V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1961).

19. Stanley Kelley, *Interpreting Elections* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Marjorie Randon Hershey, "The Constructed Explanation: Interpreting Election Results in the 1984 Presidential Race," *The Journal of Politics* 54 (1992): 943–76; Lawrence J. Grossback, David A. M. Peterson, and James A. Stimson, *Mandate Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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differences in personal beliefs and the nature of the political pressures they are subject to ensure that politicians from different parties representing the same nominal constituency, e.g., a Democratic and a Republican Senator from the same state, vote very differently.[20]

It is unclear then to what extent the failures of elected officials past and present to reflect their constituents' views have stemmed from an informational deficit that surveys might remedy. It is conceivable that the rise of polling might not have increased responsiveness. Even in the poll-suffused present, the linkage between voters' opinions and legislators' votes remains modest. In this article, I intend to determine if it really was much weaker in the past, as some scholars suggest.

To do this, I must first develop a more precise assessment of representation in the era before polling. While the majority of studies of representation and polling are focused on the period from the 1950s to the present, some scholars have investigated earlier eras and offered conflicting results. For example, Geer holds that politicians' methods of assessing public opinion in the pre-polling era were very flawed.[21] However, in a recent study, Samuel Kernell finds that election forecasts by Ohio politicians in the 1820s were comparable in accuracy to recent efforts, implying considerable knowledge of voters' leanings.[22] In an earlier effort, Charles Smith even reported that, as early as 1800, Thomas Jefferson was able to predict election results with impressive accuracy.[23]

Given this fundamental disagreement, more work is clearly needed in this area. Although our understanding of how *well-informed* earlier generations of politicians were regarding public opinion might remain very limited, there is reason for optimism regarding the ability to test claims about changes in *representational dynamics*. By providing a window onto public opinion in the 1920s and early 1930s, the Digest Polls allow for an assessment of representation in the years before scientific surveys became omnipresent in American politics. As such, a study of this period provides a baseline against which the findings about later Congresses can be compared.

OVERVIEW

Using election returns to establish the Digest Poll's external validity, I will demonstrate the utility of the Literary Digest Poll as opposed to other proxies for constituents' attitudes in the era before scientific surveys. I then describe the issues on which the Digest polled and show that politicians were well aware of their findings. Next I employ the Digest Polls to assess senators' responsiveness to constituents' attitudes for the Congresses shortly *before and after* the surveys were taken. In the earlier cases, Senators' votes could not have been informed by the Digest's findings; however, it is safe to assume that the relative positions of the state electorates on the issues in question were already roughly as the Digest Poll would reflect shortly afterward. Thus, results from the pre-Poll Congresses provide evidence of whether voting patterns reflected constituents' views absent *any* polls.

I also present multivariate models that include party dummies, election returns, and demographic data along with the Digest Polls. The party dummy allows me to assess the extent to which representation occurs via voters electing candidates from the party closer to their views. Inclusion of election results and demographic variables known to be predictive of attitudes on the issue in question gives a more complete picture. Since, lacking surveys, senators might have used these data as proxies for public opinion in their states, it will be impressive if the Digest Poll coefficients retain significance when these other variables are included in models.

THE LITERARY DIGEST POLL

Scholars have long sought proxies for public opinion in the absence of polls. A common choice is demographic data, e.g. the share of a state's residents who were farmers or Catholics. The availability of these variables facilitates roll-call analyses for votes that occurred long before the advent of scientific surveys. Yet much as they are of limited use in forecasting the attitudes of individuals, such data are crude predictors of public opinion in states.[24]

Other scholars assessing representation use state or district-level presidential election returns to measure public opinion in constituencies.[25] This measure is arguably superior to demographic variables, as it reflects actual political attitudes and behavior. Yet presidential vote is a very crude attitude proxy, especially for issues that divided party coalitions.[26]

20. Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, "The Polarization of American Politics," *Journal of Politics* 46 (1984): 1061–79.

21. Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls*.

22. Samuel Kernell, "Life Before Polls: Ohio Politicians Predict the Presidential Vote," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (2000): 569–74.

23. Charles W. Smith Jr., "Measurement of Voter Attitude" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 283 (1952): 148–55.

24. Robert Erikson, Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver, *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

25. Brandice Canes-Wrone, David W. Brady and John F. Cogan, "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting," *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002): 127–40; Sean Gailmard and Jeffrey A. Jenkins, "Agency Problems and Electoral Institutions: The 17th Amendment and Representation in the Senate," unpub. mss., 2006; Ansolabehere et al., "Candidate Positioning."

26. William M. Leogrande and Alana S. Jeydel, "Using Presidential Election Returns to Measure Constituency Ideology- A Research Note," *American Politics Quarterly* 25 (1997): 3–18.

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Another alternative is the use of state-level referenda data. This measure allows for comparison of legislators' votes with their constituents' sentiments on specific issues. Unfortunately, a host of constraints limit the applicability of this proxy—if a state did not practice "direct democracy" or if the issue was considered solely in Congress, no data are available. Moreover, even when several states addressed the same issue, they often voted years apart on different wordings. Thus, scholars using referenda to assess representation in Congress must exclude many states from their analyses or equate those in which a proposition was defeated with others where no vote occurred.[27]

For this article, I turn instead to opinion polls published in *Literary Digest*, an early twentieth-century analog to *Time* or *Newsweek*. In an effort to expand its readership, the Digest mailed mock "ballots" to potential respondents on lists developed from telephone directories, auto registries, and, in a few cities, voter rolls. Recipients were expected to complete the ballot and return via mail.[28] While there had been many earlier unscientific surveys or "straw votes"—such polls were typically conducted at county fairs or by newspapers and focused on a state or local election.[29] By contrast, the Digest conducted massive nationwide polls for more than a decade during the interwar period.

While the Digest is best known for polls concerning presidential elections, it also polled on various economic and cultural issues. In 1922, 1930, and 1932, the Digest polled on Prohibition. In 1922, they also inquired about the "Soldier's Bonus," the plan to give veterans "adjusted compensation" for civilian wages foregone during World War I. In 1924, they asked about the "Mellon Plan," Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon's program of tax cuts.[30] This diversity is a boon to researchers and strengthens the credibility of findings that hold across issues.

These polls drew a massive response. In the smallest, the totals ranged from 1,052 (Nevada) to 91,566 (New York) in 1922. In 1932, the largest issue poll, total responses ranged from 3,347 (Nevada) to 503,616 (New York). The response rate varied over time. For their 1922 poll on Prohibition and the Bonus, the response rate was only 9.1 percent. In 1930, it was 23.8 percent when they polled again on Prohibition.[31] Six years later, the percentage of ballots returned in for their infamous 1936 Presidential Poll was almost identical: 23.5 percent.[32] For purposes of comparison, the Gallup Organization's mail surveys achieved a response rate of 17.3 percent in 1936.[33]

As was the case with their presidential surveys, the Digest's issue polls were widely reported.[34] By 1924, Will Rogers was mocking them in his syndicated column, asserting that,

> it is impossible for the weather department to announce rain on a certain day without the Digest taking a straw vote on the matter. They have polled every question from "Should the Ku Klux be Allowed to Intermarry" on down to "The Personal Morals of Louis Angel Firpo."[35]

Beyond the media coverage they received, the polls drew many responses from political activists ranging from support to aspersions on their probity. Since they never found a majority for "enforcement" of Prohibition and showed a trend toward the "wet" side, it is no surprise that the Digest Polls' loudest critics were "drys." Prohibitionists charged that the Digest deliberately underpolled (presumably drier) women and known drys. Senator Wesley Jones (R-WA) reported complaints from constituents and concluded

27. L. Marvin Overby, "Assessing Constituency Influence: Congressional Voting on the Nuclear Freeze, 1982–1983," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16 (1991): 297–312; Eileen Lorenzi McDonagh, "Representative Democracy and State Building in the Progressive Era," *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 938–50; McDonagh, "Constituency Influence on House Roll-Call Votes in the Progressive Era," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 18 (1993): 185–210.

28. These mailings served the Digest's marketing purposes in two ways. An offer to subscribe was included with ballots. Beyond this, the news coverage generated by the polls increased the visibility of the Digest.

29. Claude E. Robinson, *Straw Votes: A Study of Political Prediction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

30. The Digest also polled about the New Deal in 1934 and 1935. These surveys are harder to link to specific roll-calls, so I exclude them from my analysis.

31. Walter F. Willcox, "An Attempt to Measure Public Opinion about Repealing the Eighteenth Amendment," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 26 (1931): 247.

32. Daniel Katz, and Hadley Cantril, "Public Opinion Polls," *Sociometry* 1 (1937): 155–79.

33. However, though Gallup had a lower response rate, they achieved greater accuracy because, unlike the Digest, they used targeted in-person interviews to ensure that lower income and less educated individuals would not be underrepresented in their sample as they were in the Digest Polls (Lawrence E. Benson, "Mail Surveys Can Be Valuable," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 10 [1946]: 236).

34. This interest was sustained by leading papers for many years. See, for example, "National Poll Veers against Volstead Law," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Jul. 1922, 11; "Volstead Law Loses in Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Jul. 1922; "'Wet' and 'Dry' Sentiment," *Washington Post*, 24 Jul. 1922, 6; "'Bone Drys' in Minority," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Jul. 1922, 6; "Near Tie On Bonus in Digest's Ballot," *New York Times*, 14 Aug. 1922; "The Wet-Dry Poll," *New York Tribune*, 11 Sept. 1922, 6; "Results of the 'Literary Digest' Income Tax Poll," *Washington Post*, 12 Apr. 1924, 18; "'Digest' Opens Dry Law Poll," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Feb. 1930, 2; "Digest Poll 42 percent for Repeal," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 Apr. 1930; "Illinois Wets Lead, 3 to 1, in Digest Poll," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 Mar. 1930, 1; "Drys Gain Slightly in Magazine Voting," *Washington Post*, 4 Apr. 1930, 2; "The Literary Digest Poll," *The World*, 24 May 1930, 10; "Poll of 20,000,000 on Dry Law Starts," *New York Times*, 2 Feb. 1932, 7; "Wets Hold Long Lead on Literary Digest's Poll on Dry Repeal," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Feb. 1932, 7; "Wets Maintain Lead in 'Poll'," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Mar. 1932, 4; "73 percent of Poll for Repeal," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 Apr. 1932, 7; "All but 2 States Favor Rum in Poll," *Washington Post*, 29 Apr. 1932, 3.

35. "As it Looks to Me," *Washington Post*, 26 Oct. 1924, SM4.

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"prohibition has nothing to gain but everything to lose in this poll . . . it would be wise for people who believe in prohibition to take no part in the poll."[36] He was not alone. The Northern New York Methodist Episcopal Conference voted to express "extreme disapproval" of the Digest Poll, while their sisters in the Baltimore Methodist Conference Women's Missionary Society adopted a similar resolution, contending, "this method of registering public opinion in regard to prohibition is incomplete and unreliable."[37] (Despite such complaints, dry ballots increased from poll to poll in absolute numbers, even as their share of the total responses declined.)

While drys were perhaps the most vociferous critics of the Digest Polls, complaints were also heard from other quarters, including opponents of the Mellon Plan, (which polled well), and, in an early example of spin, spokesmen for whichever party for whom the Digest forecast defeat at the next election. Unlike drys who complained about sampling problems, Senator Pat Harrison (D-MS), questioned the Digest Poll's wording. He denounced "this propaganda for the Mellon plan started by the Literary Digest," complaining that the Digest forced respondents to choose between the GOP proposal and no tax cut at all; "The Garner plan (a Democratic alternative) would give a much greater reduction than the Mellon plan and yet they keep that from the people."[38] The willingness of the Digest's critics to denounce the Digest Polls, knowing this would attract more attention to the unwelcome totals, suggests that they thought the results were already widely known and credited.

Unsurprisingly, others, chiefly anti-Prohibition forces ("wets") and the party for which the Digest forecast victory in an imminent election, defended the Digest Poll and used it to bolster claims that they spoke for the majority. Representative Fiorello LaGuardia (R-NY) was so wet that he courted arrest, "manufacturing" beer by mixing "near beer" and malt in front of reporters.[39] He found the Digest's "real expression of opinion" to be a "useful and distinct public service." Representative Royal H. Weller (D-NY), also a wet, noted that the Digest had "predicted that Calvin Coolidge would be elected by approximately 7,000,000 votes throughout this country, and he was, which indicates the thoroughness and accuracy of the poll."[40] Yet another wet, Senator Hiram Bingham (R-CT), placed the Digest Poll's state totals in the *Congressional Record* three times, in case they had escaped the notice of his colleagues.[41]

No secret to legislators, the Digest Polls clearly could have influenced their votes. Yet my chief concern here is *not* whether the Digest Polls themselves influenced members of Congress; rather, it is that they illuminate representation in an earlier era and allow evaluation of claims that the growth of polling has increased responsiveness. Scholars have long faced a conundrum: how could public opinion's effect on legislators be assessed in the absence of polls? Absent any estimate of public opinion and prior to surveys, how can we assess the effect of polling on representation?

The Digest data help resolve these problems in two ways. They allow analyses of an era in which surveys were rare and when, scholars say, few members of Congress credited them in any case. Secondly, using the Digest Polls to "postdict" Senate votes just before the surveys were taken (on the assumption that states' relative positions change slowly) permits an assessment of representation in the absence of polling.

Of course, the Digest Poll lives in infamy in the annals of survey research as an example of the perils of sampling and response bias. Its sampling frame of phone directories and automobile registries at a time when many voters had neither telephones nor cars led to a clear class bias.[42] Before 1936, the Digest had called four presidential races correctly, but it could not contend with one that divided voters by income, as its 1936 forecast of FDR's doom showed. The Digest issue polls shared the biases of their presidential election surveys. Yet a systematically biased measure may have its uses.[43]

In assessing representation, I focus on the covariation of senators' positions with those of their electorates rather than their absolute closeness—that is, on what Christopher Achen calls "responsiveness," rather than "proximity."[44] For this purpose, what matters is less a measure's *absolute* correctness in gauging public opinion than its accuracy in reflecting their *relative* positions of state electorates. Thus, a poll that correctly ranks state electorates in support of Prohibition can be used to assess legislators'

36. *Congressional Record-Senate*, 1 Apr. 1930, 7150.

37. "Disapproves Digest Poll," *New York Times*, 6 May 1930, 4; "Women at Convention Hit Digest's Rum Poll," *Washington Post*, 11 Apr. 1930, 22.

38. "Harrison Attacks Poll on Tax Bill," *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1924, 1.

39. "LaGuardia Brews: Policeman Amiable," *New York Times*, 8 July 1926, 8; *Congressional Record*, 16 May 1930, 9078.

40. *Congressional Record*, 26 Mar. 1926, 6387.

41. *Congressional Record*, 25 Feb. 1932, 4675; 10 Mar. 1932, 5682; 11 Apr. 1932, 7684.

42. The use of mail-in replies, which Landon supporters were more likely to return, compounded the bias. See Peverill Squire, "Why the Literary Digest Poll Failed," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988): 125–33; Don Cahalan, "Comment: The Digest Poll Rides Again!" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53 (1989): 129–33.

43. These polls received some attention from scholars: Willcox ("Attempt to Measure") used them to chart shifts in attitudes on Prohibition; Robinson (*Straw Votes*) cited them while assessing the merits of "straw votes" generally; and W. Phillips Shiveley ("A Reinterpretation of the New Deal Realignment," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 35 [1972]: 621–24) uses the better-known presidential election polls.

44. Achen, "Measuring Representation."

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responsiveness on the issue even if it systematically over or understated public support for that policy. The responsiveness I examine here is relative to the attitudes of the entire constituency. While scholars often discuss representation of such "subconstituencies" as the portion of the electorate supportive of a legislator's party, the nature of the Digest Poll data (state-level totals) does not permit that kind of investigation.[45]

VALIDATING THE DIGEST POLL

In fact, we can validate the Digest's results as a measure of states' relative positions by comparing their Polls to election returns. This is possible because the Digest reported state-level as well as national totals. Table 1 reports the correlation between the Digest Poll's state level predictions of the Democratic vote and the actual results in every presidential election from 1920 through 1936 as well as that between their 1932 Prohibition Poll and voters' support for slates of delegates pledged to ratify the amendment repealing that policy.

The relationship between the Digest Poll results and the actual vote is uniformly strong. Consider what might seem to be the worst case, the infamous 1936 Poll that forecast that GOP presidential nominee Alf Landon would easily unseat President Roosevelt. In this case, the correlation between the Digest Poll's predicted vote for FDR and the actual results was .9. While the Digest systematically underestimated Roosevelt's support, it forecast where he was relatively strong or weak with impressive accuracy. In earlier elections, the correlations between the Digest's prediction of the Democratic share of the vote and the state-level results were similarly strong, ranging from .88 to .96.

Other evidence reported in Table 1 suggests that the Digest Poll accurately reflected the relative positions of state electorates on issues as well as candidates. In 1933, voters in thirty-eight states elected slates of delegates pledged for or against "repeal" to conventions that considered the Twenty-first Amendment ending Prohibition. The results were reported in 36 states. These results are the closest equivalent to a national referendum against which to test a Digest issue Poll. The correlation between the share of respondents who favored repeal in the 1932 Digest Poll and the percentage voting for pro-repeal delegates in a state was .88.

These comparisons show that, whatever their absolute accuracy, the Digest Polls have great external validity regarding the states' relative positions. They can thus illuminate the relationship between senators' votes and their constituents' views in the era before scientific surveys. Although direct comparison across samples and eras is not easy, the results of this investigation can still inform the debate about whether polling has led legislators and other elected officials to represent their constituents' views much more faithfully than they once did.[46]

Table 1. Validating the Literary Digest Poll: Correlation between Digest Polls and Actual Results in Presidential Elections and Prohibition Repeal Votes (1920–1936)

1920 Democratic Presidential Vote	.88 (N = 6)
1924 Democratic Presidential Vote	.96 (N = 48)
1928 Democratic Presidential Vote	.93 (N = 48)
1932 Democratic Presidential Vote	.92 (N = 48)
1933 Vote for Delegates to State Conventions Pledged to Repeal Prohibition	.88 (N = 36)
1936 Democratic Presidential Vote	.9 (N = 48)

Note: In 1920, the Digest conducted its Presidential Poll in only six states. In all other elections, it polled in every state as well as the District of Columbia.

Correlations between Presidential Vote and Digest Polls

I compare the state vote totals in Scammon (1965). Scammon, Richard M, *American at the Polls: A Handbook of American Presidential Election Statistics 1920–1964 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965).* for each presidential election with the final Digest Poll for each year: "How The Straws say the Election Will Go," *Literary Digest*, 23 Oct. 1920, 14; "2,386,052 Straws Forecast Tuesday's Tempest," *Literary Digest*, 1 Nov. 1924, 5 "Final Returns In 'The Digest's' Presidential Poll," *Literary Digest*, 3 Nov. 1928, 5; "Roosevelt Bags 41 States Out Of 48," *Literary Digest*, 5 Nov. 1932, 8; "Landon, 1293,669; Roosevelt, 972,897: Final Returns in the Digest's Poll of Ten Million Voters," *Literary Digest*, 31 Oct. 1936.

Correlation between Digest Poll and State Votes for Delegates to Conventions to Consider the Repeal of the Twenty-first Amendment

I compare state vote totals from "The Vote on Repeal of Prohibition," *New York Times*, 8 Nov. 1933, 28; "Utah Convention Will End Dry Law," *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 1933, 1; "Republicans Concede Defeat in Louisville," *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1933, 9; with the last Digest Poll on Prohibition: "Tenth and Final Report of the Literary Digest Prohibition Poll," *Literary Digest*, 30 Apr. 1932, 7.

45. Benjamin G. Bishin, "Constituency Influence in Congress: Does Subconstituency Matter?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25 (2000): 389–15; Uslaner, *The Movers and the Shirkers.*

46. One may ask whether the Digest Poll results are more comparable to *voter* attitudes as opposed to survey measures of constituents' views that include non-voters. Of course the Digest Poll was a survey, albeit one whose results were very highly correlated with voting behavior at the state level. Griffin and Newman find that to the limited extent that members do represent constituents' opinion, it is voters' attitudes that they reflect. In any case, the basic findings of significant, but weak and uneven associations between votes and constituency opinion in the contemporary Congress holds whether the measure of district/state opinion is based on surveys or, less typically, election returns (John D. Griffin and Brian Newman, "Are Voters Better Represented?" *Journal of Politics* 67 [2005]: 1206–27; Overby, "Assessing Constituency Influence"). This basic finding also emerges in analyses based on referenda results earlier in the twentieth century (McDonagh, "Constituency Influence").

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CASES

In this section, I assess representation in the interwar Senate focusing on three issues for which votes can be compared with state-level public opinion as measured by the Digest Poll: Prohibition, the Mellon Plan, and the Bonus. These topics divided Senators in different ways. Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal's first dimension DW-NOMINATE score is a very strong predictor of senators' votes on the Mellon Plan. It is a significant predictor in the case of the Bonus as well, but the fit is far poorer. By contrast, as Poole and Rosenthal note, legislators' positions on Prohibition never mapped onto the dominant voting cleavage in Congress.[47] Because elites have far more structured belief systems than the general populace, the multidimensionality in congressional voting on major issues during this period strongly suggests that there is value in examining patterns of representation on multiple topics, as scholars focused on more recent Congresses have also done.[48]

Beyond differing in the extent to which they divided legislators along partisan lines, these issues can be differentiated in two important ways. The debates over the Bonus and Mellon Plan concerned economic policy while Prohibition was an ethnocultural issue. This diversity of issues allows for some test of whether responsiveness varies greatly across types of political questions. The issues examined also vary in durability. As I discuss below, the Bonus issue was a new controversy when the Digest polled on it in 1922. By contrast, the disputes over federal income taxes and Prohibition were long-standing by the time the Digest Polls were taken. This variation permits a test of the extent to which the age of issues affects responsiveness to public opinion among elected officials.

One common element among these issues is that they were all presumably relatively salient. Given its commercial motives—the Digest Polls were part of subscription drives—the Digest polled exclusively on high profile issues. We can thus infer relatively little from their data about congressional responsiveness to public opinion on low salience issues in the interwar years.

The topic that most interested the Digest was Prohibition. They polled on the issue in 1922, 1930, and 1932. The "liquor question" was the leading "culture war" issue of its day, akin to abortion in contemporary politics. Yet it was less partisan than abortion has become; "drys" were common in the solidly Democratic South, but were mostly Republicans in the North. In both 1922 and 1930, the median Digest Poll respondent favored the middle option, "modification" as opposed to "enforcement" or "repeal"; however, there was a notable shift in the wet direction between the first two surveys. In the final poll (which dropped the "modification" option), a large majority endorsed "repeal" a year before it occurred. While my focus is on dyadic representation, these findings suggest that on this salient issue the political system produced "dynamic" and "collective" representation in that changes in public policy followed shifts in public opinion.

While the issue of the "bonus" for World War I veterans might be more obscure to contemporary readers than Prohibition, it, too, was the subject of heated debate for over a decade. The leading veterans' group, the American Legion, sought "adjusted compensation" for the income forgone by draftees due to their removal from the civilian economy during war-induced prosperity. This demand was opposed by editorialists of all stripes and presidents of both parties. Conservatives deplored its redistributive aspect and inflationary potential, while liberals found the program less worthwhile than those geared toward the needy and disliked the Legion's jingoism and red baiting.[49]

The most spectacular episode in this struggle was the 1932 Bonus March in which thousands of veterans, dubbed the Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF), camped out in Washington D.C. to demand early payment of their adjusted compensation. President Hoover and Congress rebuffed the marchers' demands. Eventually, troops led by Douglas MacArthur forcibly dispersed the BEF amid much controversy.[50] Presidential vetoes were overridden often enough for the Legion to win first a bonus payable in 1945, then the right to borrow against it in 1931 and finally early payment in 1936. The Legion's success could have stemmed from Congressmembers' over-estimation of its electoral potency.[51] In the 1922 Poll, a narrow majority of respondents favored the Bonus. One of Gallup's earliest scientific surveys revealed 55 percent support for immediate payment of adjusted compensation in 1935, shortly before veterans finally received their Bonus.[52]

In 1924, the Digest polled respondents on the Mellon Plan. Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon served under Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover from 1921 to 1932. His eponymous plan was a series of what would now be termed "supply-side" tax cuts enacted in 1921, 1924, and 1926 that

47. Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-call Voting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113.

48. Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and its Discontents*, ed. David A. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964).

49. Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 58.

50. Ibid.

51. V. O. Key, "The Veterans and the House of Representatives: A Study of a Pressure Group and Electoral Mortality," *Journal of Politics* 5 (1943): 27–40.

52. *Gallup Poll*, 8 Dec. 1935, Question 1.

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reduced the number of Americans subject to federal income tax and lowered rates on the wealthy. Mellon's tax cuts were sold not only a way to reduce the high rates that were a legacy of World War I, but also as a means of increasing revenue. The Treasury Secretary's own vast wealth heightened populist criticism of his plan; however, possibly reflecting the Digest Poll's class bias, Mellon's plan was very popular among respondents, winning almost 70 percent support nationally and majorities in all states except South Dakota.

The key independent variable in all cases is state opinion based on responses to particular Digest issue polls. In the case of the Bonus and Mellon Plan issues, this is simply the percentage of respondents in a given state favoring the policy. In 1922 and 1930, respondents were given three choices on the issue of Prohibition: "repeal," "modification," or "enforcement." In these cases, I create a mean score for the state respondents by coding votes for repeal as zeroes, those for modification as .5's and ballots for enforcement as ones. In 1932, the "modification" option was eliminated and respondents were forced to choose between enforcement and repeal. In this case the independent variable is the percentage voting for enforcement. The dependent variables are senators' mean scores on issue scales built from roll-call votes. The scales' reliability levels are high; Chronbach's Alpha (reported in the table notes along with the roll-calls used to build the scales) equals or exceeds .8 in all cases. All variables are set to range from zero to one. I use OLS regression and present results from each Congress in which an issue on which the Digest polled was considered.

RESULTS

In Table 2, I present bivariate models in which I regress Senators' scores on issue vote scales on mean state public opinion as measured by the Digest Polls. No issue was voted on in all Congresses studied so there are empty cells in the table. I bifurcate the 67th Congress as this is the only one in which some votes on an issue (the Bonus) occurred before any Digest Poll and others afterward. (All roll-calls on Prohibition in the 65th and 66th Congresses preceded any poll). In all cases, the independent variable is state opinion as measured in the Digest Poll closest in time to the Congress in question.

Several points are clear from the results shown in Table 2. The basic finding is that, for all three issues, public opinion as measured by the Digest Poll was a significant predictor of senators' voting patterns. This is true in the case of Prohibition for all nine Congresses, and for the Mellon Plan in all three years when it came before the Senate. On the Bonus, the results are slightly weaker; however, even on this issue, a significant relationship emerges in five out of seven Congresses. The exceptions are the pre-poll portion of the 67th Congress (1921–1922) and the post-poll 72nd Congress (1931–1933).

However, while significant relationships were usually evident, the fit of the models is far from perfect. No model ever explains more than 34 percent of the variance in the voting scales built from Senate roll-calls on an issue. Yet these results do not differ notably from those reported by scholars analyzing the contemporary, poll-saturated Congress.

Scholars typically find that constituency opinion measures explain only a fraction of the variance in scales built from congressional votes. In examining the 85th Congress (1957–1958), a generation after the advent of the Gallup Poll, Miller and Stokes found no significant relationship between constituent attitudes on foreign policy and Representatives' votes. On questions of "social and economic welfare," they found a correlation of approximately .3; that is, less than 10 percent of the variance in the latter is explained.[53] The strongest representational linkage they reported was on civil rights. Even on this presumably very salient issue during a time of rising activism, the proportion of the variance explained was just under one-third.

Using larger samples collected twenty years after Miller and Stokes, Page, Shapiro, Gronke, and Rosenberg found representational relationships of broadly similar strength in the 95th Congress (1977–1978). They report "only modest relationships between constituents' policy preferences and the votes of their Congressmen."[54] Even when they added the effect of "simulated" opinion to compensate for their relatively small district-level samples, the picture did not change greatly. In the issue area where they found the strongest linkage (social welfare) they noted that constituent opinion was "still not accounting for much more than one-third of the variance in roll-call votes."[55] In some issue areas they studied, including abortion and "law and order," no significant relationship emerged between constituents' views and legislators' votes. More recent research on the contemporary Congress paints a broadly similar picture to that described above.[56]

Comparison of the Digest-based findings to results from examinations of the contemporary Congress suggests great continuity between this earlier era and our own as far as legislators' responsiveness to their constituents' views is concerned.[57] Although

53. Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," 49.

54. Page et al., "Constituency, Party and Representation," 744.

55. Ibid., 753.

56. Powell, "Issue Representation in Congress"; Uslaner, *The Movers and the Shirkers*; Ansolabehere et al., "Candidate Positioning."

57. In general, roll-call voting indices reveal a bimodal, polarized distribution of positions on various issues, while variables built from constituency attitudes are more normally distributed.

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Table 2. Literary Digest Poll and U.S. Senators' Positions on Prohibition, the Soldiers' Bonus, and the Mellon Plan—Bivariate Tests: 66–74th Congresses (1917–1937)

OLS Models	65th Cong. (Pre-Poll)	66th Cong. (Pre-Poll)	67th Cong. (Pre-poll)	67th Cong. (Post-poll)	68th Cong. (Post-Poll)	69th Cong (Post-Poll)	70th Cong. (Post-Poll)	71st Cong. (Post-Poll)	72nd Cong. (Post-Poll)	73rd Cong. (Post-Poll)	74th Cong. (Post-Poll)
Prohibition Poll	.65 (.15)*	.66 (.19)*		.76 (.19)*		.57 (.14)*	1.12 (.17)*	.67 (.14)*	.74 (.11)*	.75 (.15)*	
Constant	.09 (.08)	0 (.01)		−.05 (.10)		−.07 (.07)	−.25 (.09)*	.03 (.06)	.20 (.05)*	.08 (.09)	
R-sq.	.15	.11		.15		.14	.34	.18	.31	.21	
N	104	104		95		97	90	99	101	93	
Bonus Poll			−.07 (.15)	.51 (.14)*	.65 (.13)*			.29 (.13)*		.40 (.14)*	.39 (.13)*
Constant			.62 (.09)*	.31 (.08)*	.43 (.08)*			.68 (.08)*		.11 (.08)	.44 (.07)*
R-sq.			.003	.1	.2			.04		.08	.08
N			97	95	95			95		98	96
Mellon Plan Poll			.57 (.17)*		.65 (.15)*	.67 (.12)*					
Constant			.73 (.09)*		.11 (.08)	−.68 (.07)*					
R-sq.			.11		.16	.24					
N			95		92	95					

OLS Regression Models (* = p-value < .05, Standard Errors in parentheses).

Prohibition
State Opinion Data are from Prohibition: "Tabulation of The Prohibition Vote (Main Poll) by States," *Literary Digest*, 29 Aug. 1922, 13; "Tenth and Final Report of the Literary Digest Prohibition Poll," *Literary Digest*, 24 May 1930, 8; "Tenth and Final Report of the Literary Digest Prohibition Poll," *Literary Digest*, 30 Apr. 1932, 7.
Roll-calls are from ICPSR Study #4:
65th Congress (V20, V21, V25, V49, V50, V51, V52, V53, V57, V80, V81, V82, V87, V88, V89, V126, V127, V130, V131, V325, V326, V350) Chronbach's Alpha = .98
66th Congress (V193, V211, V222) Chronbach's Alpha = .7967
67th Congress (V151, V157, V163, V164, V179, V180, V182, V209, V262) Chronbach's Alpha = .85
69th Congress (V168, V169, V234, V235, V238) Chronbach's Alpha = .8
70th Congress (V170, V171, V172, V173) Chronbach's Alpha = .8793
71st Congress (V346, V347, V362, V417, V418) Chronbach's Alpha = .895
72nd Congress (V57, V101, V102, V117, V118, V119, V226, V238, V275, V276, V277, V278, V280, V281, V282) Chronbach's Alpha = .964
73rd Congress (V19, V20, V21, V22, V24, V25) Chronbach's Alpha = .962
The Soldier's Bonus
State Opinion data from "The Final Margin in Favor of the Bonus" *The Literary Digest*, 9 Sept. 1922, 14.
Roll-calls from ICPSR Study #4:
67th Congress (Pre-Poll) (V153, V235, V236, V237, V240, V291, V485, V486) Chronbach's Alpha = .961 (Post-Poll) (V657, V658, V663, V665, V672, V678) Chronbach's Alpha = .918
68th Congress (V116, V144) Chronbach's Alpha = .876
71st Congress (V428, V434) Chronbach's Alpha = .964
73rd Congress (V49, V137, V227) Chronbach's Alpha = .81
74th Congress (V68, V69, V72, V79, V145, V146, V148) Chronbach's Alpha = .922
The Mellon Plan
State Opinion are from "Mellon Plan" from "Final Report on the 'Digest' Tax Poll," *Literary Digest*, 12 Apr. 1924, 10.
Roll-calls were taken from ICPSR Study #4:
67th Congress (V186, V191, V192, V195, V196, V197, V198, V188, V200, V201, V202, V203, V204, V205, V205, V210, V211, V212, V226, V231, V232, V233, V234, V239, V240, V241, V242, V243, V245, V246, V247, V249, V250, V252, V253, V254, V264) Chronbach's Alpha = .989
68th Congress (V117, V118, V119, V120, V122, V123, V124, V127, V128, V131, V133, V134, V135, V136, V137, V138, V139, V140) Chronbach's Alpha = .987
69th Congress (V50, V51, V52, V58, V60, V61, V62, V63, V66, V68, V69, V72, V73, V74, V75, V76, V77, V78, V81, V82) Chronbach's Alpha = .967

significant relationships emerge, they seldom explain more than a fraction of the variance and even this does not hold for all issues. This similarity in findings reported for different Congresses over many years implies that the rise of polling since the 1930s and the greater reliance upon it by successive generations of elected officials has not resulted in increased responsiveness to public opinion by members of Congress.

Beyond simply assessing responsiveness in an earlier era we can use the results reported in Table 2 to gain leverage on another relevant question; did the Digest Polls themselves affect responsiveness? To answer this question we need to compare the coefficients for the Digest Poll variable in the Congresses preceding the polls with those following them. It would be unwise to over-interpret small shifts in coefficients or the fit of models. Changes in the mean and distribution of vote scales may not reflect preference shifts among senators as much as variation in the voting agenda from one Congress to the next. Still, such comparisons provide some insights.

Comparing results from Congresses before and after Digest Polls were taken reveals differences across issues. On Prohibition, the Digest Poll coefficients are fairly stable and those for the pre-poll 65th and 66th Congresses differ little from the later post-poll ones. Similarly, in the Mellon Plan models, the coefficient for the Digest Poll variable changes little from the pre-poll 67th Congress to the post-poll 68th and 69th. These results suggest little direct effect of the Digest Polls on senators' voting on either of these issues. Rather, the results reveal that senators were responsive to constituents' views on both Prohibition and the Mellon Plan, even in the absence of a Digest Poll, let alone the scientific surveys that are common today.

The results for the Bonus are somewhat different. In the 67th Congress, the Digest Poll proves a significant predictor of senators' votes on the Bonus only after it was released. This finding suggests that, at least in this instance, the Digest survey indeed *might* have informed votes. However, one cannot come to this conclusion easily as disaggregating further reveals a significant relationship between the last Bonus roll-call before the Digest Poll, (which occurred on 20 June 1922) and the Digest variable. This finding suggests that, even before the release of the Digest's Bonus poll, responsiveness to the attitudes it would reflect was already beginning to increase.

An alternate explanation for the seeming increase in responsiveness to constituents' attitudes on the Bonus focuses on the *newness* of the issue.[58] Prohibition had been debated for decades at both the state and national levels, as had the federal income tax (most prominently in the state-level fights over ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment). Thus, well before the Digest Polls existed, senators had a chance to learn their constituents' views on these subjects. This was not true for the Bonus issue, which was *sui generis*. There had, of course, been controversy over the subject of pensions for Union veterans in the decades following the Civil War, but that issue differed greatly from the Bonus question. Because Confederate veterans were excluded from the program, it was much more divisive in regional and partisan terms than the question of compensation for World War I veterans.[59] In addition, for many years, eligibility for the Civil War pensions was restricted to disabled veterans, a practice that led to many fraudulent disability claims being approved around election times in swing states.[60] By contrast, the proposed adjusted compensation for World War I veterans would go to those from all regions as a universal entitlement. Accordingly, it would not be expected to polarize voters along regional or partisan lines or to raise concerns about corruption as the Civil War pensions had.

Thus legislators could not expect that local attitudes prevalent in earlier decades concerning Civil War pensions would predict constituents' views on the matter of adjusted compensation after World War I. The Bonus issue really was new in the early 1920s, and, as a result, senators might have been more uncertain initially about local sentiment on the topic than they were concerning attitudes about Prohibition or the Mellon Plan. Thus both the Poll and the passage of time, in which senators could learn about their constituents' views in more traditional ways, could have contributed to the strengthening of the relationship between constituent opinion and senate voting on the Bonus.

MULTIVARIATE TESTS: THE ROLE OF PARTY AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

The results reported in Table 2 show that senators' votes significantly reflected their constituents' opinions as measured by the Digest Polls, both before and after they were taken. Other questions remain that can be answered only by multivariate tests, which I report below. One concerns the role

58. Recall that Page et al. ("Constituency, Party, and Representation") found no responsiveness on abortion in the late 1970s, a time when the issue was a relatively new one for members of Congress, Similarly, Converse and Pierce found a stronger relationship in the 1960s between constituent opinion and the positions of French legislators on issues that had been debated for many years such as church-state relations as opposed to newer topics like European integration (Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1986]).

59. John Mark Hansen, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919–1981* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

60. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

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of party. Did representation result from voters choosing senators from the party whose stands they preferred? If so, the coefficients for the Digest Poll variable should drop sharply when party dummies are added to models. If the Digest Poll coefficients are largely stable that would indicate that senators' votes incorporated local attitudes, even if it meant deviation from their parties' policies. To assess the role of party, I use a dummy variable *GOP* coded as "1" if the senator was a Republican and "0" otherwise.

A second question concerns how well senators could assess public opinion without surveys. Whether they lacked polls or simply mistrusted them, senators were not without cues. Beyond direct contact with constituents, they had access to the same election returns and demographic data that scholars later used to explain their votes. Knowing how well Harding ran in their state or the percentage of Catholics or potential bonus recipients residing there might have helped senators supplement their interactions with constituents.

In all multivariate models, I include a variable, *Presidential Vote*, which is the mean state-level Republican percentage of the vote in the two presidential races preceding the Congress analyzed. The demographic variables vary by issue. For Prohibition, I add two that reflect the scholarly consensus that the issue pitted urbanites, especially Catholics, against largely Protestant small-town and rural folk.[61] *Urban* and *Catholic* are the percentages of a state's residents who fell into those categories. For the Bonus, I include two variables, *Bonus Recipients* and *Taxpayers*, which are the percentages of a state's residents eligible for "adjusted compensation" and subject to federal income tax during the Congress under study respectively. One might expect electorates that included a high proportion of taxpayers (who were a small minority in that period) to be less supportive of the Bonus and those in which potential recipients were numerous to be more favorable to it. The multivariate Mellon Plan models also include the *Taxpayers* variable for obvious reasons.

Table 3 displays results of regressions in which I add the variables mentioned above to the bivariate models reported in Table 2. The results from the multivariate models do not greatly alter the story told above. A significant relationship between the Digest Poll variables and Senators' voting records again emerges for all three issues. Comparing the sizes of coefficients in the multivariate models with the earlier results reveals some differences, however. The coefficient for the Prohibition Poll drops in all Congresses. Yet it remains significant except in the pre-poll 65th and 66th Congress and the post-poll 69th. *GOP*, the party dummy, was significant in half of the Congresses; Republicans were drier. *Urban* and *Catholic* were both significant predictors of wetness, the former in four Congresses, the latter in two.

By contrast, the inclusion of control variables in models does not lower the Digest Poll coefficients for the other issues. The coefficients for the Bonus Poll actually *increase* slightly in most cases compared to the bivariate models. *GOP* is significant in three of the five Congresses during Republican administrations, with senators from that party less likely to support the Bonus. By contrast, in the two Congresses that governed with FDR, the *GOP* coefficients were not close to significant. With loyalty to the president no longer a constraint, Republican senators became relatively more supportive of the Bonus. The *Bonus Recipients* variable never had a significant effect and *Taxpayers* did only in the final Congress.

In the case of the Mellon Plan, the Digest Poll coefficients are not consistently higher or lower than in the bivariate models. The *GOP* coefficient is significant in all three Congresses (Republicans favored the Mellon Plan) and greatly improves the fit. The *Taxpayers* coefficient is never significant, while *Presidential Vote* is only significant in the 69th Congress when, surprisingly, a stronger GOP performance in presidential elections predicts opposition to the Mellon Plan.[62]

Comparing the multivariate pre-poll results with those from post-poll Congresses reveals some differences. Coefficients for the Digest Poll variables are generally higher in the post-poll Congresses. The coefficient for the Digest Mellon Plan poll doubles from the 67th through 69th Congresses, while the one for the party dummy is more than halved. The Prohibition Poll coefficient from the pre-poll 67th Congress is lower than all but one of those from the post-poll Congresses. The coefficient for the Digest's Bonus poll in the pre-poll session of the 67th Congress is significant in the multivariate model (unlike the result in Table 2), but is lower than in most subsequent Congresses. Given the findings reported in Table 2 however, these results could suggest less that the Digest Polls were increasing responsiveness per se than that senators were using them more and demographic variables and party affiliation less to gauge constituent opinion. However, this possible use of polls as a new cue did not usually result in increased responsiveness.

These findings are not without limitations. They indicate the responsiveness of Senators to state-level public opinion in a relative rather than absolute sense. The entire debate on key issues may be closer

61. Peter H. Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928); Charles W. Eagles, "Congressional Voting in the 1920s: A Test of Urban-Rural Conflict," *Journal of American History* 76 (1989): 528–34.

62. This anomalous result may stem from collinearity between the GOP dummy and Republican Presidential vote, and it is not a stable finding. In various specifications however, the coefficient of greatest interest, the one for the Literary Digest Poll variable changes very little.

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Table 3. Literary Digest Poll and Senators' Positions on Prohibition, the Soldiers' Bonus, and the Mellon Plan: 66–74th Congresses (1917–1937)

	65th Cong. (Pre-Poll)	66th Cong. (Pre-Poll)	67th Cong. (Pre-Poll)	67th Cong. (Post-Poll)	68th Cong. (Post-Poll)	69th Cong. (Post-Poll)	70th Cong. (Post-Poll)	71st Cong. (Post-Poll)	72nd Cong. (Post-Poll)	73rd Cong. (Post-Poll)	74th Cong. (Post-Poll)
Prohibition Poll	.29 (.17)	.32 (.23)		.49 (.2)*		.3 (.16)	.67 (.19*)	.40 (.16)*	.45 (.11)*	.51 (.2)*	
GOP	−.15 (.07)	−.2 (.1)*		−.14 (.11)		−.02 (.07)	−.09 (.1)*	−.10 (.09)	−.2 (.06)*	−.23 (.1)*	
Presidential Vote	−.33 (.07)*	−.04 (.2)		−.11 (.25)		−.2 (.18)	−.02 (.22)	−.22 (.22)	−.25 (.16)	−.37 (.21)	
Catholic	.42 (.19)*	.32 (.25)		−.08 (.43)		.68 (.32)*	.38 (.2)	.39 (.2)	.37 (.15)*	.11 (.25)	
Urban	.42 (.17)*	.29 (.21)		.67 (.2)*		.12 (.15)	.40 (.18)*	.44 (.17)*	.46 (.13)*	.55 (.21)*	
Constant	.41 (.13)*	.29 (.17)		.15 (.16)		.10 (.12)	−.13 (.15)	.16 (.15)	.5 (.1)*	.54 (.15)*	
Adj. R-sq.	.27	.15		.23		.18	.43	.33	.51	.33	
N	104	91		95		95	89	93	100	92	
Bonus Poll			.36 (.12)*	.73 (.16)*	.73 (.16)*			.42 (.15)*		.36 (.17)*	.34 (.15)*
GOP			−.7 (.08)*	−.3 (.11)*	−.02 (.06)			−.28 (.09)*		.07 (.06)	−.06 (.08)
Presidential Vote			.13 (.19)	−.03 (.26)	−.35 (.22)			−.12 (.24)		−.27 (.22)	−.30 (.21)
Taxpayers			.02 (.18)	.14 (.25)	−.11 (.22)			−.13 (.17)		−.36 (.19)	−.34 (.16)*
Bonus Recipients			−.16 (.26)	−.4 (.37)	.04 (.3)			−.03 (.28)		.13 (.27)	.34 (.28)
Constant			.33 (.1)*	−.22 (.15)	.7 (.1)*			1.2 (.14)*		.32 (.15)	.79 (.14)*
Adj. R-sq.			.57	.21	.20			.21		.12	.15
N			97	95	95			94		98	94
Mellon Plan Poll			.41 (.09)*		.61 (.11)*	.81 (.14)*					
GOP			.81 (.06)*		.61 .06)*	.29 (.08)*					
Presidential Vote			.11 (.14)		.06 (.14)	−.38 (.2)*					
Taxpayers			.11 (.1)		−.1 (.13)	.23 (.18)					
Constant			−1.9 (1)*		.81 (.09)*	−.88 (.1)*					
Adj. R-sq.			.78		.72	.33					
N			95		88	94					

Multivariate Tests OLS Regressions (* = p-value <.05 Standard Errors in parentheses.)

Roll-call and Digest Poll data are as in Table 2. Party dummies are taken from ICPSR Study #4. Republican presidential vote: is from http://www.uselectionatlas.org/.
The percentages of urban residents are taken from the U.S. Census for 1920 and 1930.
The percentage of Catholics is drawn from Census Bureau, *United States Census of Religious Bodies, 1926*, http://www.thearda.com (it is the Catholic variable from the ARDA file divided by state population).
The percentage of taxpayers by state for 1920–1924 is taken from "Table No.184: Personal Income Tax Returns: By States and Territories, 1919–1924," in *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1926*, 180; "Table 202: Personal Income Tax Returns: By States and Territories, 1923–1928," *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1931*, 208; "Table #No. 202 Individual Income Tax Returns By States and Territories 1930–1932," in *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1935*, 179; "Table No. 187: Individual Income Tax Returns, by State and Territories, 1934–1936," in *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1939*, 184.
The percentage of Bonus recipients is taken from "Table No. 164: Adjusted Compensation Awards: Number and Amount to June 30, 1927, by Residence," in *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1928*.

to voters' views than it was in the era before polls, without the correlation between constituent opinion and congressional voting scales being any stronger.

CONCLUSIONS

The Literary Digest Poll illuminates patterns of representation in the years before scientific surveys were widely used by politicians. Comparing the central finding of real, but modest covariation between legislators' votes and their constituents' views with studies of more recent Congresses suggests great continuity in representation over nearly a century.

Constituency opinion as measured by the Digest Polls was a significant predictor of senators' votes on both cultural and economic issues. Thus the multidimensionality evident in Senate voting in which Prohibition remained an issue that cross-cut the dominant cleavage reflected the structure of mass attitudes. Constituent opinion as measured by the Digest polls was a significant predictor of senators' votes even when their party affiliations were held constant. Representation thus did not occur merely through partisan selection by voters.

The relationships between constituents' views and senators' votes were far from deterministic. The Digest Poll variables never explained more than about a third of the variance in Senate vote scales. Yet the magnitude of this effect differs little from typical findings regarding the relationship between public opinion and members' votes in the contemporary Congress. The significant association between the Digest Poll measures of constituent opinion and Senate voting scales was robust to the inclusion of party dummies, presidential vote, and demographic variables in models and in two of three issue areas emerged even in the Congresses before the relevant Digest Poll was taken. This suggests that senators knew more about their constituents' views than demographics and election returns conveyed, even in the absence of any polls. With the possible exception of the Bonus issue, there was little evidence that the Digest Polls themselves led to greater responsiveness on the part of senators. The newness of the Bonus issue might have meant that legislators were initially less well-informed about their constituents' views on the question.

These findings suggest that the story of representation in the 20th century U.S. is one of continuity, not change. The thesis that the growth of polling has increased politicians' responsiveness to public opinion finds little support from my analyses. Polls have affected American politics in many ways. They have changed campaign reporting. In encouraging party elites to support or reject particular candidates, polls have become causes as well as symptoms. They almost certainly have led to a more informed understanding of public opinion on the part of elected officials and voters themselves. Nevertheless, there are phenomena that they have not fundamentally altered, and it appears that one is representation.

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