



# American Public Opinion

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ROBERT S. ERIKSON | KENT L. TEDIN

# American Public Opinion

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Robert S. Erikson

*Columbia University*

Kent L. Tedin

*University of Houston*



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# American Public Opinion

*Dedicated to the memory of Maggie Banks Tedin (1947–2008),  
companion and wife of Kent Tedin for 32 years,  
and friend of Bob Erikson and his family.*

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## Figures

Figure 2.1: Compiled by Robert S. Erikson and Christopher Wlezien.

Figure 3.1: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.

Figure 3.2: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.

Figure 3.3: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.

Figure 3.4: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.

Figure 4.1: American National Election Studies, 1970–2008.

Figure 4.2: American National Opinion Research Center, Gallup, and General Social Survey.

Figure 4.3: The U.S. Role in the World Poll, 1996: University of Maryland; Gallup; National Opinion Research Center; General Social Survey; Transatlantic Trends Survey.

Figure 4.4: Roper, General Social Survey, and Gallup.

Figure 4.5: Richard G. Niemi, John Mueller, and Tom W. Smith, *Trends in Public Opinion* (New York: Greenwood, 1989); General Social Survey (1989–2006); Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics of American Politics, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2009); FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

Figure 4.6: Gallup, GSS.

Figure 4.7: CBS/NYT Polls averaged yearly.

Figure 4.8: James A. Stimson.

Figure 4.9: Compiled from Gallup Polls.

Figure 4.10: Gallup Poll.

Figure 4.11: Gallup Poll.

Figure 5.1: CIRP Freshman Study, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles.

Figure 5.2: “America’s Views and Mood 1998,” *Public Perspective* (December/January 1999), p. 65.

Figure 5.3: University of Michigan Political Socialization Study Data. Recalls of vote decisions are from 1973, 1982, and 1997 survey waves.

Figure 6.1: Surveys by *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, Pew Center.

Figure 6.2: American National Election Studies (1958–2008).

Figure 7.1: American National Election Studies, 2008.



- Figure 7.2: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.  
 Figure 7.3: National Election Studies data.  
 Figure 7.4: Gallup Poll, 1952–1976; National Election Studies, 1980–1992; Voter News Service, 1996–2000; NEP, 2004–2008.  
 Figure 7.5: National Election Studies.  
 Figure 7.6: National Election Studies.  
 Figure 8.1: Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics 2007–2008* (Washington: CQ Press, 2008), augmented by data from *Editor and Publisher* and *Pew Web* sites.  
 Figure 8.2: ANES election studies.  
 Figure 9.1: Compiled by authors.  
 Figure 9.2: American National Election Studies election data.  
 Figure 9.3: American National Election Studies election data.  
 Figure 9.4: Compiled by authors.  
 Figure 9.5: National Election Studies data.  
 Figure 9.6: Compiled by authors.  
 Figure 9.7: National Election Studies data.  
 Figure 10.1: NEP Exit Polls.  
 Figure 10.2: <http://voteview.com>.  
 Figure 10.3: <http://voteview.com>.  
 Figure 10.4: <http://voteview.com>.  
 Figure 10.5: <http://voteview.com>.  
 Figure 11.1: Updated from Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002, Figure 9.1).  
 Figure 11.2: Robert S. Erikson, Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver, *Statehouse Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

## Tables

- Table 2.2: [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com).  
 Table 3.1: ANES (American National Election Studies); D&K (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996); Luntz (Luntz Research); IRC (IRC Survey Research Group); WP (*Washington Post*); Pew (Pew Center for People and the Press); CBS/NYT (CBS News/*New York Times*); GSS (General Social Survey); Ipsos (Ipsos Public Affairs); TNS (TNS Intersearch); G&C (Gibson and Caldeira 2009).  
 Table 3.2: National Election Studies, 2008.  
 Table 3.3: National Election Studies, 1989 pilot study data.  
 Table 3.4: National Election Studies, 1989 pilot study.  
 Table 3.5: National Election Studies, 2004 election data.  
 Table 3.6: Adapted from National Election Studies, 1994.  
 Table 3.7: National Election Studies, 2008.  
 Table 3.8: National Election Studies, 2008 election data.  
 Table 3.9: Paul R. Hagner and John C. Pierce, “Correlative Characteristics of Levels of Conceptualization in the American Public, 1956–1976,” *Journal of Politics* 44 (August 1982), pp. 779–809, 1980–1988; compiled by Paul Hagner and Kathleen Knight 2000; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 279.  
 Table 3.10: National Election Studies, 2008 data.  
 Table 3.11: National Election Studies data.  
 Table 3.12: National Election Studies, 2008 data.  
 Table 4.1: General Social Survey, 2008; General Social Survey, (2006).  
 Table 4.2: Gallup Poll, (2009); ANES (2008); GSS (2006); GSS (2004); Pew (2009).

- Table 5.1: M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 78. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.
- Table 5.2: M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 41. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.
- Table 5.3: Adapted from Amy Liu, Sylvia Ruiz, Linda DeAngelo, and John Pryor. 2009. "Findings from the 2008 Administration of the College Senior Survey (CSS); National Aggregates." Report from the Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, Table 42.
- Table 5.4: For 1984 students and faculty, Ernest Boyer and Mary Jean Whitelaw, *The Condition of the Professoriate: Attitudes and Trends, 1989* (New York: Harper, 1989); for 1999 faculty, Denise E. Magner, "Faculty Attitudes and Characteristics: Results of a 1998–1999 Survey," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Sept. 3, 1999), pp. A20–A21; the 1999 college seniors data are courtesy of Dr. Jerry Jacobs, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania.
- Table 5.5: 2006 Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service, Institute for Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; 1998–2008 pooled General Social Survey (18–23 year olds, whites only).
- Table 5.6: CBS News/*New York Times* polls.
- Table 6.1: John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 203; \*The Freedom Forum (June 12–July 5, 2002).
- Table 6.2: John Sullivan, James Piereson, and George Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); General Social Survey (GSS), 1985; CBS: Robert Chandler, *Public Opinion* (New York: Bowker, 1972); Herbert McClosky, 1958; Herbert McCloskey "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," *American Political Science Review* 58 (June 1964); CLS: Herbert McClosky and Alida Brill, *Dimensions of Political Tolerance* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); Louis Harris and Alan F. Westin, *The Dimensions of Privacy* (Stevens Point, WI: Sentry Insurance, 1979); James L. Gibson, *Freedom and Tolerance in the United States* (NORC: unpublished codebook, 1987); *Washington Post/CBS News* 1970, 2006; Pew Research Center (PEW) 2009; The Freedom Forum, 1997; First Amendment Center (FAC), 2005; *Fox News* (2002).
- Table 6.3: 1954 data are from Samuel Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (New York: Wiley, 1954); 1972 and 2006 data are from the General Social Survey.
- Table 6.4: James Gibson, *Freedom and Tolerance in the United States* (National Opinion Research Center: unpublished codebook, 1987).
- Table 7.1: ANES, 2000; GSS, 2008; GSS 2006; ANES, 2008.
- Table 7.2: ANES, 2008; GSS, 2008.
- Table 7.3: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 7.4: Princeton Survey Research Associates; Gallup; General Social Survey; ANES.
- Table 7.5: American National Election Studies; Gallup.
- Table 7.6: American National Election Studies; GSS; *Washington Post* poll.
- Table 7.7: National Election Studies; General Social Survey; ABC News; Pew combined surveys (n = 74,446).
- Table 7.8: Adapted from Corwin Smidt, Lyman Kellsteadt, and James Guth "The Role of Religion in American Politics" In Corwin Smidt (ed), *Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009).
- Table 7.9: 2008 National Election Study.



- Table 7.10: 1956 data adapted from Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 78; the 1985 data are from the General Social Survey.
- Table 7.11: American National Election Studies; CNN/ORC; General Social Survey.
- Table 8.1: Pew Research Center, "Public's News Habits Little Changed by September 11" (June 9, 2002); "News Audiences Increasingly Politicized" (June 8, 2004); "Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources" (August 17, 2008).
- Table 8.2: David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996), pp. 15–18; William Schneider and I.A. Lewis, "Views on the News," *Public Opinion* 8 (Aug.–Sept. 1985), p. 7.
- Table 8.3: Adapted from Farnsworth and Lichter, 2007; Media Monitor, 2009.
- Table 8.4: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 8.5: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 8.6: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.1: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.2: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.3: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.4: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.5: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.6: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.7: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 9.8: Compiled by authors.
- Table 10.1: Stanley and Niemi, 2009.
- Table 10.2: Kathleen A. Frankovic and Laurily K. Epstein, "Congress and Its Constituency: The New Machine Politics," paper delivered at American Political Science Association Meeting, Washington DC, Sept. 1979.
- Table 10.3: Compiled by authors.
- Table 10.4: Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics of American Politics, 2005–2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2006), p. 75.
- Table 10.5: American National Election Studies, 2008 election data.
- Table 11.1: Alan D. Monroe, "Consistency Between Public Preferences and National Policy Decisions," *American Politics Quarterly* 7 (Jan. 1979), p. 9. Copyright © 1979 by Sage Publications. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

# Preface

In this eighth edition of *American Public Opinion*, we present an accounting of the role of public opinion in the democratic politics of the United States. As with the previous editions, this edition discusses the contemporary literature on public opinion, supplementing it with our own illustrations and analyses of contemporary public opinion data. It provides an in-depth analysis of public opinion, beginning with its origins in political socialization, the impact of the media, the extent and breadth of democratic values, and the role of public opinion in the electoral process. *American Public Opinion* is unique in that it goes beyond a simple presentation of data and discussion of the formation of opinion, to include a critical analysis of the role of public opinion in American democracy. As in previous editions, the eighth edition examines the relationship between public opinion and policy.

## New to This Edition

Because public opinion and electoral politics are always changing, each edition of this book requires extensive revision. In this eighth edition, we strive to keep the discussion as current as possible, and professors and students will notice the following:

- The most recent data on contemporary issues such as abortion, gay rights, gun control, race relations, and health care policy
- Data on the 2008 presidential election from the American National Election Studies
- The most recent literature is updated and incorporated throughout the text
- Extensive changes in Chapter 8, "The News Media and Political Opinions," reflect the rapid transformation of American news media
- New election data has been introduced in Chapter 9

Despite the extensive rewrite of material, readers familiar with the seventh edition (including the updated version) will notice few changes in format. The chapter titles are identical to those from the seventh edition. The within-chapter headings have changed little.

## Acknowledgments

As this book has evolved through multiple editions over thirty years, so too has the list of authors. The first edition (1973) was authored by Robert S. Erikson and Norman L. Luttbeg. With the second edition, Kent L. Tedin joined the team as a third author. That triumvirate held through three editions. By the time of the fifth edition, Luttbeg left the team to pursue other scholarly pursuits. This is the third edition solely authored by Erikson and Tedin. But Luttbeg's contribution to the book remains, most notably in the five linkage models which he originated.

The preparation of this volume relies heavily on the survey data of the American National Election Studies, conducted by the University of Michigan, supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, and made available by the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research. We also relied extensively on the General Social Survey (also funded by the National Science Foundation) and the data available online from the Roper Center Data Archive at the University of Connecticut. These organizations bear no responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here. We are greatly indebted to them for making their data available to us, and to other scholars on whose research we depend. We benefit from the assistance provided by our editor, Eric Stano, and to colleagues, students, and staff at Columbia University and the University of Houston. Our special gratitude goes to Kathleen Knight of Columbia University for her advice at many stages of this project. We would like to thank those who most recently reviewed this text: Ted G. Jelen, University of Nevada–Las Vegas; Geoff Peterson, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire; Greg Shaw, Illinois Wesleyan University; and Allen R. Wilcox, University of Nevada–Reno.

Special thanks go to Aaron Diamond, Yair Ghitza, and Kelly Rader, for their invaluable research assistance.

Robert S. Erikson  
Kent L. Tedin

# Contents

	List of Figures and Tables	xi
	Credits for Figures and Tables	xv
	Preface	xix
CHAPTER 1	Public Opinion in Democratic Societies	1
1-1	<i>Public Opinion and Government</i>	1
1-2	<i>Public Opinion Defined</i>	7
1-3	<i>The Evolution of the Public Opinion Poll</i>	9
1-4	<i>The Modern Public Opinion Poll and Its Political Consequences</i>	13
1-5	<i>Sources of Information on Public Opinion</i>	16
1-6	<i>Linkage Models Between Public Opinion and Public Policies</i>	19
1-7	<i>Plan of This Book</i>	22
CHAPTER 2	Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion	25
2-1	<i>The Value of Polls</i>	25
2-2	<i>Sampling</i>	28
2-3	<i>Question Wording</i>	40
2-4	<i>Polls and Predicting Elections</i>	47
2-5	<i>Conclusion</i>	53
CHAPTER 3	Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion-Holding	57
3-1	<i>Political Attention and Opinion-Holding</i>	59
3-2	<i>Liberal-Conservative Ideology and the Organization of Opinions</i>	72
3-3	<i>Party Identification and the Organization of Political Opinions</i>	83

CHAPTER 4	Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Political Sentiment	92
4-1	<i>The Micro Foundations of Macro Opinion</i>	93
4-2	<i>Trends in Policy Opinions</i>	95
4-3	<i>General Ideological Movement</i>	113
4-4	<i>General Partisan Movement</i>	115
4-5	<i>Presidential Approval</i>	118
4-6	<i>Conclusion: What Moves Public Opinion?</i>	122
CHAPTER 5	Political Socialization and Political Learning	125
5-1	<i>The Preadult Years: Socialization to Citizenship</i>	125
5-2	<i>The Agents of Preadult Socialization</i>	129
5-3	<i>College: Higher Education and Its Impact</i>	138
5-4	<i>Personal Predispositions and Political Attitudes</i>	143
5-5	<i>Socialization During Adulthood</i>	146
5-6	<i>The Persistence of Political Orientations</i>	154
5-7	<i>Conclusion</i>	157
CHAPTER 6	Public Opinion and Democratic Stability	161
6-1	<i>Support for Democratic Values</i>	162
6-2	<i>Political Consensus</i>	174
6-3	<i>Political Support: Trust and Efficacy</i>	176
6-4	<i>Personality and Democratic Citizenship</i>	183
6-5	<i>Conclusion</i>	188
CHAPTER 7	Group Differences in Political Opinions	190
7-1	<i>Socioeconomic Class and Political Opinions</i>	190
7-2	<i>Race and Political Opinions</i>	199
7-3	<i>Age and Political Opinions</i>	204
7-4	<i>Religion and Political Opinions</i>	207
7-5	<i>Geography and Political Opinions</i>	213
7-6	<i>Gender and Political Opinions</i>	218
7-7	<i>Conclusion</i>	223
CHAPTER 8	The News Media and Political Opinions	226
8-1	<i>The Evolution of the American Media</i>	226
8-2	<i>Bias and Negativity in the News</i>	232
8-3	<i>Models of Media Effects</i>	241
8-4	<i>Media Content and Political Opinions</i>	246
8-5	<i>Media Change and the Quality of Electoral Decision-Making</i>	251
8-6	<i>Political Advertising</i>	255
8-7	<i>Conclusion</i>	258

CHAPTER 9	Elections as Instruments of Popular Control	260
9-1	<i>Political Campaigns and the Voter</i>	261
9-2	<i>Policy Issues and Voters</i>	267
9-3	<i>Explaining Election Outcomes</i>	280
9-4	<i>Conclusion</i>	288
CHAPTER 10	The Public and Its Elected Leaders	292
10-1	<i>Opinion Sharing Between Policymakers and the Public</i>	292
10-2	<i>Political Parties and Representation</i>	296
10-3	<i>Leadership Responsiveness to Public Opinion</i>	305
10-4	<i>Do Elected Officials Need to Follow Public Opinion?</i>	312
10-5	<i>Interest Groups and Democratic Representation</i>	316
10-6	<i>Conclusion</i>	319
CHAPTER 11	Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy	322
11-1	<i>Assessing the Impact of Public Opinion on Policy</i>	322
11-2	<i>Interpreting the Public's Role in Democracy</i>	330
11-3	<i>The Expansion of Political Participation</i>	332
APPENDIX	The American National Election Study and the General Social Survey Questions	335
A-1	<i>Questions from the American National Election Studies</i>	336
A-2	<i>Questions from the General Social Survey</i>	340
References		341
Index		375



# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures

Figure 2.1	Democratic vote for president (as share of two-party vote) by Democratic strength (as percent of two-party vote) in all polls (combined) in the final week of the campaign, 1952–2008	50
Figure 3.1	Distribution of composite opinion scores, 2008	79
Figure 3.2	Composite opinion by information level	82
Figure 3.3	Composite opinion by party identification	87
Figure 3.4	Democratic and Republican composite opinion, by information level. Low information scores include all without perfect “high” scores	88
Figure 4.1	Private versus government health insurance	98
Figure 4.2	Support for school integration, open housing, and busing to integrate public schools	101
Figure 4.3	“Do you think it would be best for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stayed out of world affairs?”	105
Figure 4.4	Percentage who say the United States is spending “too little” on the military, armaments, and defense	106
Figure 4.5	Law-and-order opinion and the rate of violent crime	109
Figure 4.6	Would vote for qualified woman or qualified black for president	111
Figure 4.7	Ideological Identification of the U.S. Public, 1976–2008 Question: “How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?”	114
Figure 4.8	The public’s policy “mood,” 1952–2008	115
Figure 4.9	Macropartisanship, 1945–2009	117
Figure 4.10	Presidential approval, Truman to Clinton	119

<b>Figure 4.11</b>	<i>Presidential approval by month, George W. Bush. (Values for 9/01 and 3/03 include only polls post-9/11 and post-invasion, respectively.)</i>	119
<b>Figure 5.1</b>	<i>Ideological self-identification of college freshman, 1970–2008</i>	139
<b>Figure 5.2</b>	<i>Party identification by age in 1990 and 1998 (percentage Democratic minus percentage Republican)</i>	150
<b>Figure 5.3</b>	<i>Vote for president as adults, by party identification as high school youth in 1965</i>	156
<b>Figure 6.1</b>	<i>Question: “In order to curb terrorism in this country, do you think it will be necessary for the average person to give up some civil liberties, or not?”</i>	169
<b>Figure 6.2</b>	<i>Trends in public trust by item</i>	178
<b>Figure 7.1</b>	<i>Social welfare opinions by family income (whites only)</i>	193
<b>Figure 7.2</b>	<i>Party identification and presidential vote by family income, 2008 (whites only)</i>	198
<b>Figure 7.3</b>	<i>Major party Democratic presidential vote (whites only) by top third and bottom third of family income, 1952–2008</i>	199
<b>Figure 7.4</b>	<i>Race and the two-party presidential vote, 1952–2004</i>	204
<b>Figure 7.5</b>	<i>Religion and party identification (Northern whites only), 1956–2008</i>	210
<b>Figure 7.6</b>	<i>Party identification among white Southerners, 1952–2008</i>	217
<b>Figure 8.1</b>	<i>Downward trends in the audience for two traditional media sources of news</i>	229
<b>Figure 8.2</b>	<i>Sources of presidential campaign news</i>	251
<b>Figure 9.1</b>	<i>The national two-party vote (percent Democratic), 1946–2008</i>	263
<b>Figure 9.2</b>	<i>Party identification and the vote for president, 1952–2008</i>	264
<b>Figure 9.3</b>	<i>Issue voting by level of information, 2008</i>	273
<b>Figure 9.4</b>	<i>Presidential vote by income growth, 1948–2008</i>	282
<b>Figure 9.5</b>	<i>Net evaluations of presidential candidates (1952–2004) from NES likes and dislikes of candidate leadership and personality</i>	283
<b>Figure 9.6</b>	<i>Candidate ideology and voter responses (hypothetical)</i>	285
<b>Figure 9.7</b>	<i>Mean ratings by voters of their own positions and candidates’ positions on seven-point liberal–conservative scales, 1972–2008</i>	287
<b>Figure 10.1</b>	<i>Partisanship and ideology of state electorates, 2004</i>	297
<b>Figure 10.2</b>	<i>House of Representatives members scored on two dimensions of liberalism–conservatism, 2007–2008</i>	301
<b>Figure 10.3</b>	<i>Party differences in roll-call liberalism–conservatism, U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, 2007–2008</i>	302
<b>Figure 10.4</b>	<i>House of Representatives roll-call liberalism, 2007–2008, by district 2004 presidential vote, by party of representative</i>	309
<b>Figure 10.5</b>	<i>Senate roll-call liberalism, 2007–2008, by state opinion (2004 EMR Exit Polls), by party of senator</i>	309
<b>Figure 11.1</b>	<i>Public opinion (mood) and policy liberalism (laws) over time</i>	326
<b>Figure 11.2</b>	<i>State policy liberalism and public opinion</i>	328

## Tables

Table 2.1	<i>Sampling Error and Sample Size Employing Simple Random Sampling</i>	31
Table 2.2	<i>Accuracy of Final Polls in the 2008 Presidential Election</i>	51
Table 3.1	<i>Level of Information Among the Adult U.S. Population</i>	61
Table 3.2	<i>Opinion by Level of Political Information, 2008</i>	65
Table 3.3	<i>Turnover of Opinion Response on Selected Issues, 1989 ANES Pilot Study</i>	67
Table 3.4	<i>Opinion Consistency on Abortion, 1989</i>	68
Table 3.5	<i>Opinion Consistency on Whether Government Should Provide Fewer or More Services, 2004</i>	69
Table 3.6	<i>Perceived Meaning of Ideological Labels, 1994</i>	74
Table 3.7	<i>Ideological Preferences and Opinions on Selected Policy Issues, 2008</i>	75
Table 3.8	<i>Correspondence of Ideological Self-Ratings and Summary of Positions on Ten Issues, 2008</i>	76
Table 3.9	<i>Levels of Political Conceptualization, 1956–2000</i>	77
Table 3.10	<i>Correlations Between Opinions on Selected Issues, 2008</i>	81
Table 3.11	<i>Public Perceptions of Party Differences on Issues, 1988–2004</i>	85
Table 3.12	<i>Party Identification and Policy Opinions, 2008</i>	87
Table 4.1	<i>Opinion About Spending Too Little, About Right, or Too Much on Selected Federal Programs</i>	96
Table 4.2	<i>Opinion Distributions on Social Issues (Percentage of Opinion-Holders)</i>	108
Table 5.1	<i>Relationship Between High School Student and Parent Opinions on Four Policy Issues, 1965</i>	131
Table 5.2	<i>High School Student Party Identification by Parent Party Identification, 1965</i>	132
Table 5.3	<i>College Student Political Attitudes as Freshmen in 2004 and Seniors in 2008</i>	140
Table 5.4	<i>Political Orientations of College Faculty and College Seniors, 1984 and 1999</i>	142
Table 5.5	<i>Youth Attending and Not Attending College</i>	143
Table 5.6	<i>Ideological Identification (% Conservative Minus % Liberal) by Birth Cohort, 1984, 1992, 2000, 2008</i>	147
Table 6.1	<i>Support for Democratic Values Stated in the Abstract</i>	163
Table 6.2	<i>Support for Democratic Values, by Specific Application</i>	164
Table 6.3	<i>Public Tolerance for Advocates of Unpopular Ideas, 1954–2008</i>	165
Table 6.4	<i>Levels of Tolerance Using Content-Controlled Items (1987)</i>	167
Table 7.1	<i>Subjective Social Class and Opinions About Spending on Selected Government Programs</i>	192
Table 7.2	<i>Opinions on Noneconomic Domestic Issues by Subjective Social Class (Whites Only)</i>	194
Table 7.3	<i>Joint Effect of Income and Education on Selected issues, Whites Only</i>	195