

Chapter 10: Public Opinion

What Is Public Opinion?

- Public opinion
- V.O. Key, Jr.'s definition
- Scientific polling vs. informal and haphazard measures

Measuring Public Opinion

- Accuracy techniques
- Measurement error
- Straw polls
- Nationalization of modern polling

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(1 of 6)

Attitudes

- Attitude
- Varying strength and consistency
- Used to evaluate phenomena

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(2 of 6)

Ideologies

- Liberals
- Conservatives
- Core values
- Other attitudes and principles exist

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(3 of 6)

Partisanship

- Disposition toward political parties
- Identification as psychological identity
- Increasing polarization
- Effects of ambiguity

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(4 of 6)

Acquiring Opinions

- “Menu” of possibilities
- Political socialization
- Influenced by personal experiences
- Typically based on collective thought

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(5 of 6)

Information

- Payoff must exceed information costs
- Cognitive miserliness and information availability
- Detailed policy questions
- Polls are mediated, sometimes biased

The Influences and Determinants of Public Opinion

(6 of 6)

Framing

- Instability of opinion
- Ambivalence
- Framing
- Defining political agendas

Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(1 of 6)

- Formal and informal political institutions
 - Gives opinion shape and force
- Aggregate public opinion

Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(2 of 6)

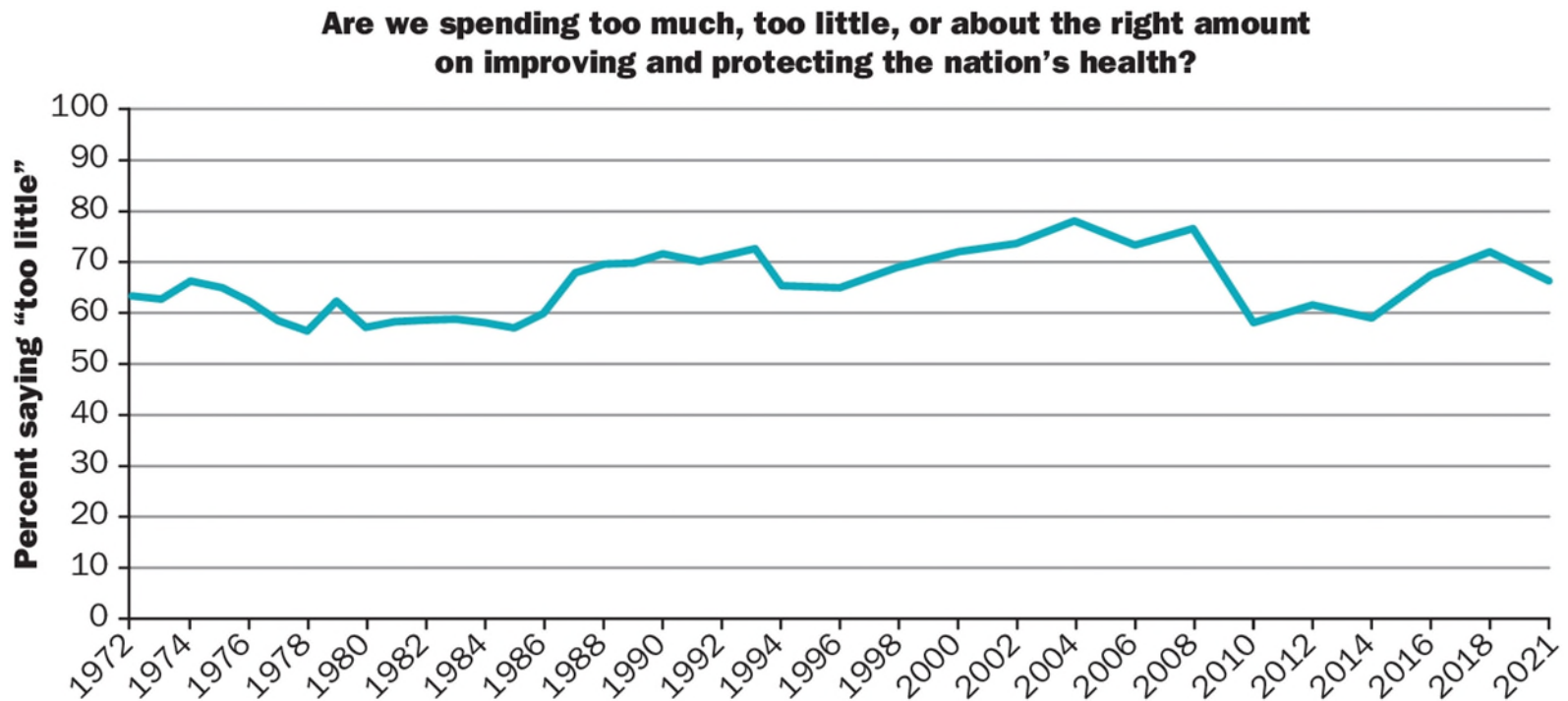
Stability of Aggregate Public Opinion

- Highly stable
- Responsive to policy change
 - Cyclical or short-term changes possible
- Aggregate partisanship

Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(3 of 6)

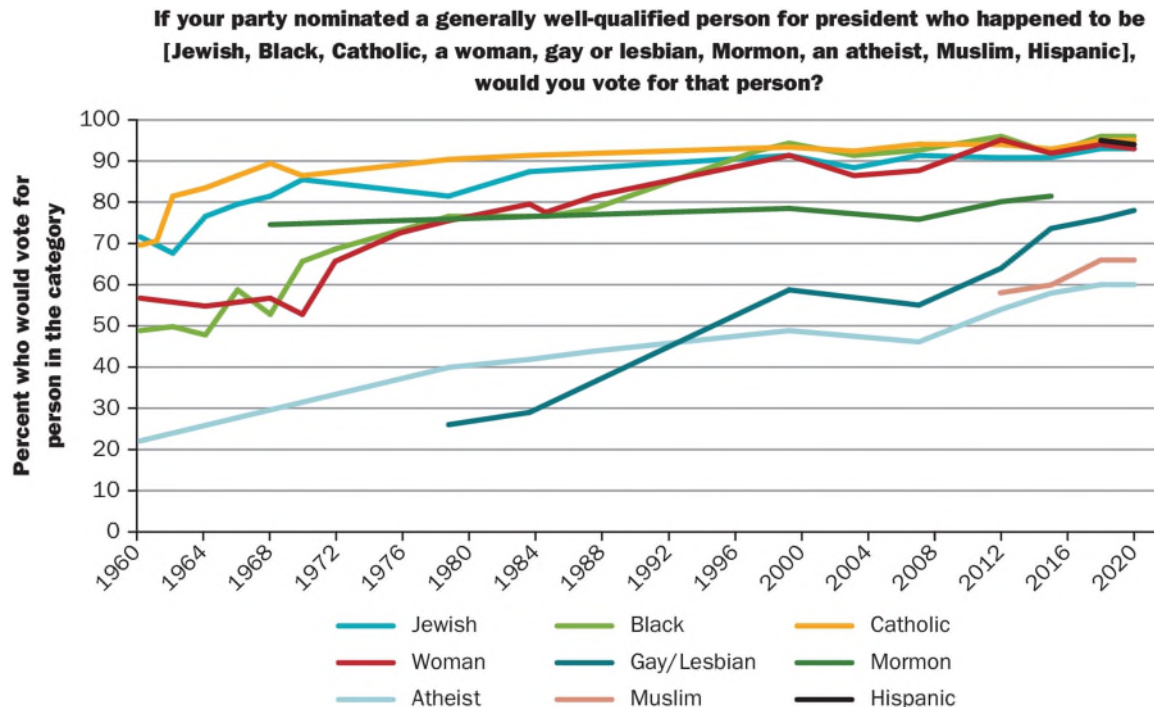
Figure 10.1: Public Opinion on Health Care Spending:
Too Little



Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(4 of 6)

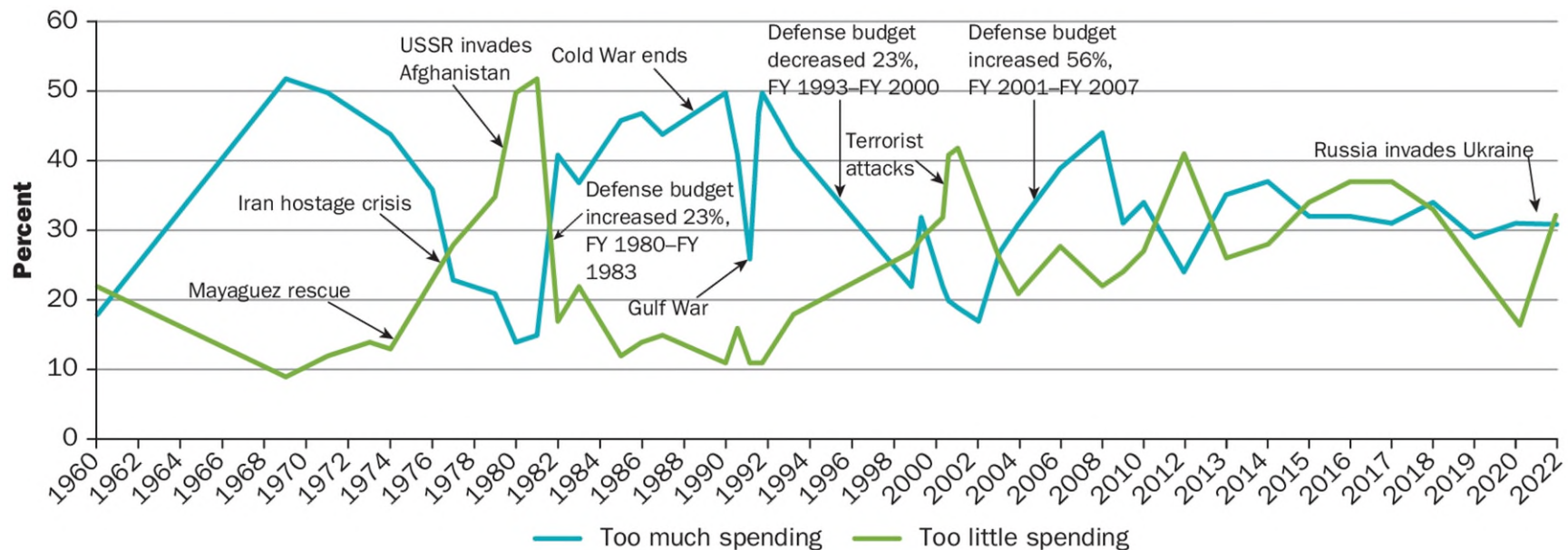
Figure 10.2: Acceptance of Presidential Candidates Based on Identities



Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(5 of 6)

Figure 10.3: Public Opinion on Defense Spending, 1960-2022



Is Public Opinion Meaningful?

(6 of 6)

Opinion Leadership

- Measurement errors cancel random changes
- Opinion leaders
- Cognitive shortcuts
- Issue publics

Current Public Opinion

(1 of 7)

Opinions about Democratic Institutions

- Most support core democratic rights.
 - Practical applications introduce breakdown.
- Framers avoided direct popular rule.
 - Equal outcomes vs. equal opportunity.

Current Public Opinion

(2 of 7)

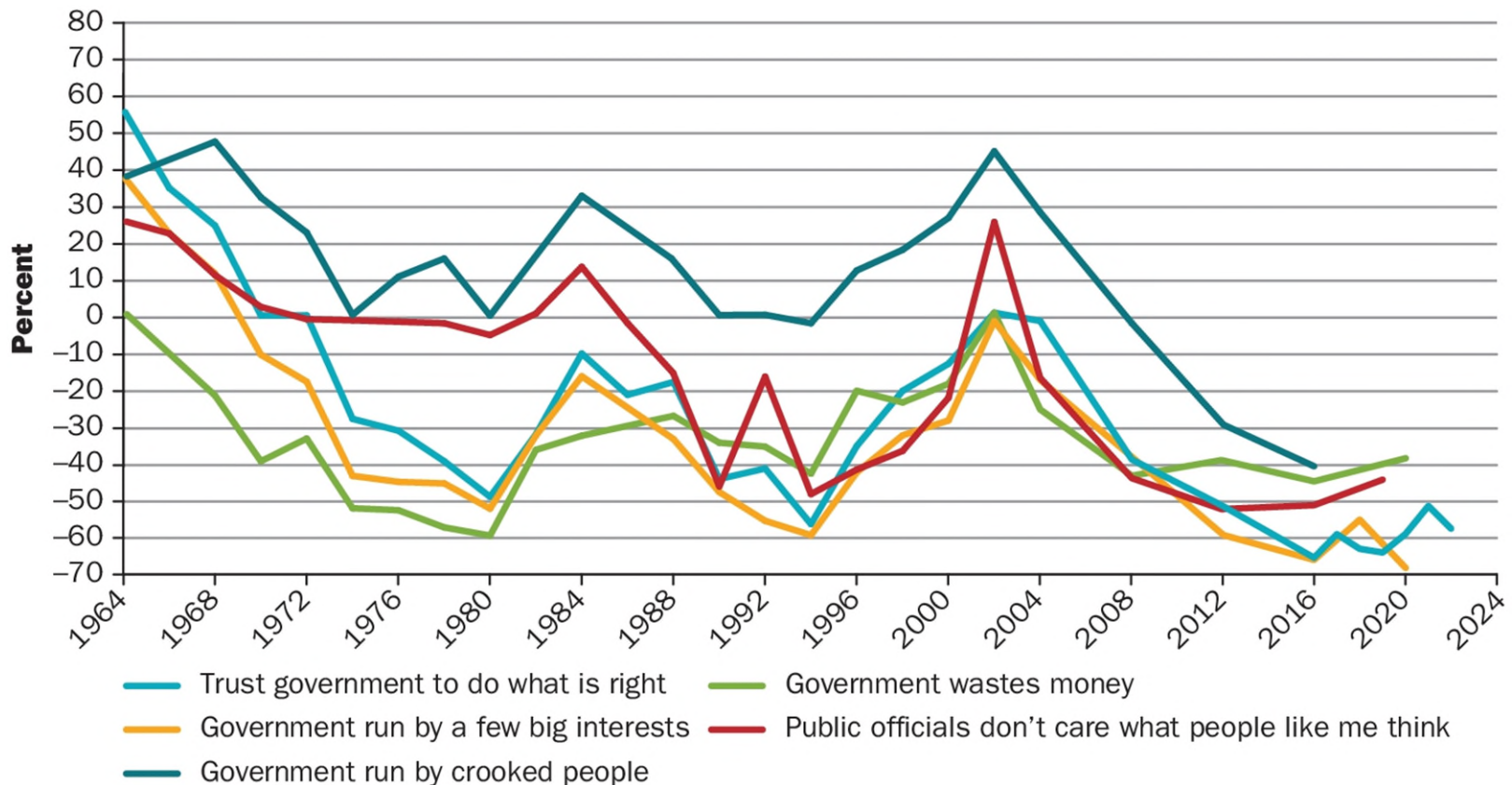
Opinions about Government

- Increasing distrust of government
- Measures to curb politicians
- Effects of 9/11
- Brinksmanship in Congress

Current Public Opinion

(3 of 7)

Figure 10.4: Americans' Varying Cynicism about Government



Current Public Opinion

(4 of 7)

Public Opinion on Issues: Economic Issues

- Mainly support regulated capitalism
- Trending toward increased intervention
- Spending that benefits everyone

Current Public Opinion

(5 of 7)

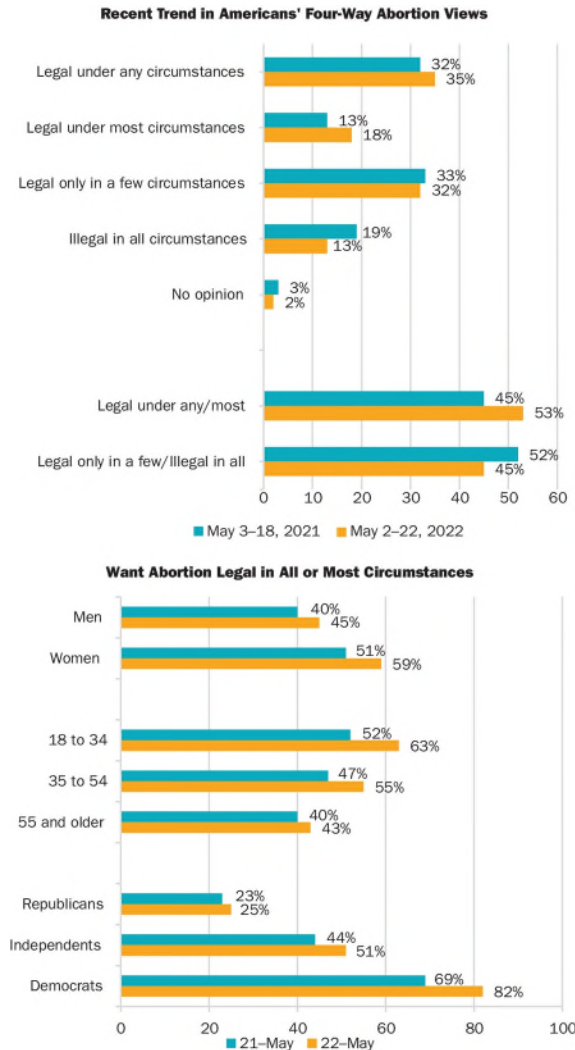
Public Opinion on Issues: Social, Cultural, and Moral Issues

- Distribution both moral and material
- Contemporary controversies including abortion, religion in public life, and rights.
- Trend of liberalizing views.

Current Public Opinion

(6 of 7)

- Figure 10.5: Change in Public Support for Abortion Rights: Pre and Post *Dodd v. Jackson* Decision



Current Public Opinion

(7 of 7)

Public Opinion on Issues: Foreign Policy

- Largely invisible during peacetime.
- Responsive to opinion leadership
- Rise of partisanship, “nation-first” mentality
- Combating terrorism

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (1 of 6)

Race and Ethnicity

- White Americans mostly support equal opportunity for all races and support laws that ban discrimination based on race and ethnicity.
 - Not always the case.
- Policing: large differences of opinion across racial and ethnic backgrounds

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (2 of 6)

Gender

- Gaps in party identification
- Disinclination toward violence
- Issues supported more by women
- Differing standpoints on gender parity

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (3 of 6)

Income

- Essential conflict addressed by Constitution
- Role of economic self-interest
- U.S. income gap

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (4 of 6)

Education

- Shift in highly educated opinion
- Shift in lower-educated opinion
- Differences apparent in social issues

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (5 of 6)

Religion

- Significant to American history
- Most Americans are religiously affiliated
- Most liberal/conservative religions
- Increasingly tied to partisanship

Effects of Background on Public Opinion (6 of 6)

Other Demographic Divisions

- Age of voters
- Region and type of environment
- Piecing together coalitions

Public Opinion: A Vital Component of American Politics

- Neither simple nor unmediated
- Aggregation both measures and expresses
- Can be influenced, not controlled
- Practical components resistant to change