Public Opinion and Political Culture in Washington State

John Pierce, Nicholas P. Lovrich, and Stuart Elway

This chapter appears in the book:

Clayton, Cornell, Lance LeLoup, and Nicholas Lovrich, 2004. Washington State Government and Politics. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press.

The Meaning of Public Opinion

THE SUBJECT OF PUBLIC OPINION is a frequent topic of political discussions, both in private conversations and in the mass media. Moreover, public opinion has been the subject of some of the classic works of contemporary political science (V.O. Key, Jr. 1965). Public sentiments on specific issues constitute a key political lever and resource in policy advocacy. Political candidates and established politicians alike frequently put their own "spin" on public opinion to achieve their own ends. Unfortunately, the term is used in so many differing ways that it lacks common understanding. It is important, therefore, that the concept be carefully defined at the outset.

The meaning of the term *public* can depend on the use to which it is applied (Pierce, Beatty, and Hagner 1982). Most often, we think of the public as the group of individuals who are found within some kind of formal political boundary. So, it might be the *American public,* or in the case of this book, the *Washington State public.* But there are other, more refined possible definitions. The *attentive public* is one such term, describing individuals who have an ongoing interest in politics, who know the major elements of their public institutions and political processes, and who pay close attention to political developments. *Issue public* is another refined concept often used by social scientists who study public opinion. This term refers to the portion of the citizenry that is especially interested in and cares about any outcomes arising over discussions and policy making in regard to a specific issue. For example, avid hunters may pay very close attention to hunting regulations and policy discussions concerning those regulations, but others may be uninterested in and inattentive with respect to that dimension of politics and public affairs.

The particular meaning attached to the term "public opinion" is important, because any boundary drawn around the individuals residing within a public jurisdiction may make a difference in the characterization of the content of the "public opinion" of that political entity. Scholars or politicians may pay particular attention to the opinions of the attentive public because they believe—with good reason—that citizens who pay attention to politics and follow public affairs are the most likely to vote and to seek to influence the thinking of their friends and neighbors. Interest group representatives, in contrast, are typically more interested in issue publics because their sentiments are critical to the effective mobilization of influence in the policy process. In order to raise money from persons with intense interests, to organize lobbying and electoral support for their cause, and to creative effective media communications to promote their views it is important that interest group representatives (e.g., environmentalists, right-to-life advocates, etc.) have an accurate assessment of their issue public's primary concerns. Whatever the definition adopted, the key point is that the boundary used to identify people affects judgments made about the character of public opinion in a political community.

Differences associated with varying understandings of relevant "publics" are most likely to occur when the issue or opinion in question is directly relevant to a particular interest in a community whose opinion is being described. When considering the opinions of individuals in regard to the clear-cutting of old growth timber, for example, it surely will make a difference whether the public being described includes only those who are directly affected economically by the policy or includes all of the citizens living in a particular jurisdiction.

There are other kinds of boundary issues that regularly come to play in the definition of public. For example, how old must an individual be to be included as part of public opinion? Should she be 16 (driving age), 18 (voting age), or 21 (legal drinking age)? What kind of citizenship requirements should be imposed for one to be included within the public? Must the person be a citizen, or should residency within the prescribed area suffice? What about convicted felons, or students whose homes are elsewhere but who reside in a residence hall at a university or college during the school year? How those boundaries of inclusion are set is important because they may determine the resulting opinion that is ascribed to a particular political community.

The second component to the concept of public opinion is *opinion.* Does one favor or oppose a particular position on an issue of public interest? That element of opinion is usually referred to as the *affective* element of public opinion. The *cognitive* element of opinion represents the dimension of human sentiment having to do with what one's *reasoning* is concerning an issue or person. For instance, is a ballot measure raising gasoline taxes to address traffic congestion and road repair seen as another attempt of an inefficient government to penalize its citizens for its own inability to operate within its proper means? Similarly,

is the candidate standing for election seen as experienced, or as lacking in pertinent knowledge? Is an incumbent public official seen as ethical or opportunistic? Is a policy proposal seen as timely or out-of-date? These are all examples of the cognitive dimension of opinion. Finally, it is important to note that the true test of public opinion may be patterned *behavior* rather than attitudes. For example, many people claim to be "environmentalists," but may not act systematically to conserve energy, recycle, drive in car pools or take public transportation.

In describing the opinion of a public, by whatever definition, one is describing an aggregation or collection of individual opinions. For most issues affecting political life there is seldom a consensus among the citizenry. For many issues it is difficult to maintain that a public opinion actually exists. More commonly, a distribution of sentiments and predispositions—affective, cognitive, and behavioral—exists, which itself may have a number of characteristics. One of those characteristics is the degree to which a consensus exists. Generally, scholars require that there be 75+ percent agreement on a position to proclaim a consensus. If such widespread agreement does not exist, then a further question is fostered—i.e., what shape does disagreement take? Is public opinion spread along a continuum of some kind with equal percentages at various points, or are there groups of people widely separated from one another? The character of this opinion distribution may explain the presence or absence of conflict arising in the politics associated with this area of public opinion. Likewise, it is important to know the *intensity* with which people hold their opinions. Great division on some issue may mean little in terms of politics or conflict if nobody really cares. Similarly, there may be complete consensus on some topic, but if no one cares there may be no real need for public officials to respond to the preferences in question.

The Importance of Public Opinion

Given this discussion of the dimensions of the public and the elements of opinion, why should one care about public opinion—whether it be national in scope or that of the citizens of Washington State? There are several answers to that question.

Democracy. The most compelling reason for learning about public opinion stems from the dictates of democracy. The republican form of government under which we live accords substantial weight to public opinion. Popular sovereignty confers upon "the people" the awesome power of self-rule. Government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" compels those who govern to keep a watchful eye on what the people prefer to be done in their name.

The degree to which public policy matches public opinion is only one of several traits that make a governmental system democratic, however. Other

criteria include the degree to which there is protection of individual rights to participate in the making of political choices, and to speak freely about those choices. Another is the degree to which all citizens have equal access to those rights and freedoms, including the choice of political leaders. Still another is the extent to which there is open competition among alternative seekers of political office, such as political parties and candidates.

The mechanisms through which some level of agreement between public opinion and public policy is produced have been referred to as *political linkage processes* (Luttbeg 1974). An obvious linkage mechanism is that of periodic elections. Political parties and individual candidates, in theory at least, actively compete for the votes of citizens, either on the basis of general ideological perspectives (e.g., liberal or conservative) viewed as overall guides to policy, or on the basis of differences on specific issues (e.g., favor the Endangered Species Act or wish to repeal it). Still in theory, voters in the public electorate then vote for candidates and/or incumbent officials according to the positions they state on ideological platforms (e.g., "no new taxes") or on issues deemed to be important to the public acting as voters. The winner, in principle, is the candidate for public office whose ideological stance and/or policy positions most closely match the voters' preferences. Election winners typically claim to represent "a mandate" to implement policy reflecting those preferences.

Another linkage mechanism exists between interest group members and their leaders, whose role it is to actively represent the interests of citizens who have policy preferences on policy questions but who are not able (for lack of time or knowledge of policy processes) to act on their preferences. Advocates of "pluralist democracy" argue that a wide variety of interest groups carry their unique positions to policy makers, bargain among themselves, provide the mass media with information about policy options, and—out of all this interaction— come to play a key role in the formulation of a public policy that approximates the distribution of preferences in the general public.

It is also possible to identify a linkage mechanism in cases where an "elite democracy" is in evidence. This term applies to a political jurisdiction that is governed by a process of open competition among individuals of uncommon influence or ability who claim to serve in the best interests of the general public. While the general public may not directly influence these elites, they take on the obligation of determining the public's preferences and reflecting those preferences in their public policy decisions.

While various mechanisms connect public opinion to public policy, one receiving considerable recent attention is that of *electronic democracy* (or e-democracy). This linkage mechanism entails citizens having open access to electronic terminals connected to a central server that records a multitude of actions taken on the periphery. Policy positions may be presented to the public, either in text form or in video format, and then citizens listen to the arguments, perhaps participate in those discussions themselves, and signal their choices through their own personal terminals.

Questions about this electronic approach to democracy challenge the degree to which it provides the opportunity for bargaining, compromise, and coming to agreement through mutual accommodation. Critics also contend that not all citizens have equal access to the resources required to participate effectively in e-democracy. In some contexts this inequitable access to computers and connectivity has been called the "digital divide" (Compaine 2001), suggesting that an unjust chasm in political influence and power exists between those who have access to these resources and the knowledge to use them, and those who do not. Scholarship on the digital divide often notes that the largest gulfs in access and ability occur between those parts of the public which are already in disadvantaged social locations—whether by income, education, or race and ethnicity—and those which already exercise disproportionate influence. In this case, then, electronic democracy might simply exacerbate problems of political linkage.

Theories of Public Opinion Formation

Why do people hold the opinions they do? Why does that question bear any relevance to an understanding of the opinions of the citizens of Washington State?

Political culture effects. Political culture is the mix of political behaviors, attitudes, cognitive beliefs, and values that characterize a political unit, such as a country or a state (Elazar 1994; Inglehart 1990). Political culture concerns "how things are generally done" in politics in a particular jurisdiction, and what norms or conventions exist to set the boundaries on acceptable attitudes and behaviors if one is to be part of the active citizenry. An adviser to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once described the United States as being comprised of 47 states and the "Soviet of Washington." That remark indicated the presence of a very distinctive political culture in the Evergreen State, one that was considerably more radical (anti-establishment) than that of other states. A prevailing political culture is thought to affect how people who live in an area tend to be raised, tend to express their political sentiments and hopes, and what they tend to believe about politics. At the same time, as societies become more mobile and the numerous elements of mass media come to displace the influence of local newspapers, the external influences on the distinctive political attitudes of a state could erode its distinctiveness from other states. These forces would act as countervailing influences on a state's citizens. Perhaps as a consequence of these influences in the state and the large scale in-migration of citizens from throughout the country, one currently might be hard pressed to call it "the Soviet of Washington." Even so, remnants of that time in the state's history

remain in some of the distinctive institutions and political practices in the state. Washington's dramatic Populist and Progressive reform eras left permanent anti-establishment legacies in Washington State politics, and those legacies are clearly seen in following chapters in this book on political parties, interest groups, the state legislature, and initiatives.

Period effects. In a country's history, the dominant features of certain periods have a powerful, formative effect on the way people behave in the political arena (Jennings and Niemi 1975). Among the most important kinds of period effects are those related to the economy and to war and peace. The Great Depression structured American values and beliefs for generations, leading to greater support for the growth of government and its involvement in maintaining economic stability. The Vietnam War, or the Watergate Scandal, or the destruction of the World Trade Towers are such visible and intense and deeply felt experiences that they can alter the way large portions of the public feel about politics. Again, the degree to which those period effects result in distinctive Washington State public opinion would depend on the degree to which they are uniquely relevant to the state or to the particular individuals who live in the state. The dramatic economic downturn of the beginning of the twenty-first century may come to have particular effects on Washington's citizens. The nation's economic problems were especially serious in high technology sectors, and Washington's unusual dependence on high technology industries—namely, aerospace and computer hardware and software—meant that the downturn hit that state's economy particularly hard. Washington had the highest unemployment in the country at one point during that period, and that experience may result in lasting changes in political attitudes and values among Washingtonians.

Political socialization effects. Much of what we believe stems from what we are taught, what we are "socialized" to believe (Greenstein 1965). The primary agents of socialization (those from whom we learn about politics) are our parents, our peer groups, our schools, and the mass media to which we are exposed. Historically, continuity in beliefs within nations (and within regions inside of nations) has been the norm because parents were the primary sources of political learning. Various changes in family structure and social mobility in recent decades have greatly diminished the effects of parental socialization, and have significantly increased the role of media.

Social location effects. What individuals come to believe may grow out of their position in the social structure of the country (Campbell et al. 1960). Individuals who are lower in the economic structure, or who perform different kinds of work, or who are systematically disadvantaged because of race/ethnicity, or who have historically occupied distinctive social and gender roles, may have different attitudes about important political issues. Those differences may grow out of the way in which the location in the social structure may be linked to

alternatives in regard to a public policy, such as tax policy that differentially affects people in different social locations.

Personality/psychological effects. Many scholars who seek to explain why people hold particular opinions argue that beliefs, attitudes, and values are deeply rooted in the way those opinions serve particular needs of a person's personality (Sniderman 1975). Holding a particular opinion of disregard for other groups, for example, may reflect low self-esteem. Other scholars have argued that some global political classifications allow individuals to navigate the complex world of politics without undue effort. Holding highly favorable opinions toward Republicans, for example, allows one to evaluate particular Republicans favorably without going through the effort of assessing each one in terms of their positive and negative attributes.

Rationality. The rational choice approach to public opinion formation assumes that individuals are motivated to maximize their self-interest (Downs 1957). Borrowing from economics, this approach adopts the assumption that individuals know what their goals are, and, when confronted with public policy options, evaluate those options in terms of how they benefit or detract from those goals. Individuals calculate the costs and benefits involved, and support the alternative with the greater net benefits. When individuals lack complete information about the costs and benefits of policy options, they tend to turn to sources of guidance that have provided them with reliable cues for rational behavior in the past for guidance.

Summary. Any particular opinion held by an individual or by a collective public undoubtedly results from more than any one of the preceding theories regarding people's source of opinions. Nonetheless, when trying to determine why residents of Washington hold certain opinions, it may be helpful to look back at these various explanations to possibly assist in achieving a deeper understanding of public opinion in the Evergreen State.

Stability and Change in Public Opinion

Commentators and citizens alike enjoy discussing change in public opinion. "Has the public become more conservative?" "Has support for the governor fallen?" "Have citizens become more supportive of mass transit?" Unfortunately, answers to such questions are not easy to formulate. Indeed, fully understanding the degree to which public opinion is changing requires looking at both individual and aggregate (the public as a whole) levels simultaneously.

At the aggregate level, one is tempted to simply gauge the percentage supporting a particular opinion at two points in time to conclude whether change or stability is in evidence. But that evidence can be misleading. For example, one may find that the percentage supporting an income tax in Washington has not changed in recent years, and conclude that there is great stability in those

opinions. That very well may not be the case, however. It may be that there has been a great deal of change, with many persons who used to favor an income tax no longer doing so, and an equal number of others who used to oppose an income tax now favoring it. The consequence is that, even though the overall distribution remains the same, there has been substantial change in opinions within the public. One might argue that it makes no difference because there still will be the same number opposing or supporting the tax policy. It may make a substantial difference, however, if those who are changing in a particular direction share particular characteristics that may lead to greater or lesser levels of participation in politics.

Looking at the question from another perspective, one may find that the overall distribution in support of the income tax has in fact changed over time, but no particular individual has changed her or his opinion. How could this happen? One way this could occur is by generational or cohort replacement. As older generations die off and leave the public, they are replaced by younger generations entering the public. Those groups entering and leaving may hold different views on public policy. Thus, even though no particular individual has changed an opinion over time, the overall public has changed in its distribution. Likewise, there are times when public boundaries change. For example, if a new group—such as young people after a change in voting age laws—is admitted into the electorate, and these people hold views that are different than held by the former collective, overall public opinion may change. Finally, a state may experience great tides of in-migration, and the newly arrived may bring with them very different opinions than those already established there. The in-migration of many persons from California to the Puget Sound area is one such significant factor in Washington State.

Political Culture

Political culture is the characteristic mix of attitudes, values, behaviors, and institutions that reflect a particular history and approach to politics. What distinguishes the political culture of Washington State, and how does that compare to the political cultures of other places in the United States? Most of the major political science research into questions of political culture in the United States has focused upon comparison at the state and city level. In Washington State, the state's largest cities to the east and west of the Cascade Mountains—Spokane and Seattle, respectively—are most often characterized as areas featuring quite different political cultures.

To date, the most influential classification of cities and states into types of political culture was developed by Daniel Elazar. In his work called *The American Mosaic* (1994), Elazar has suggested that there are three major types of political cultures in the United States: the *individualistic,* the *moralistic,* and the

traditionalistic. He argues that any particular place holds a mix of those three culture types, but that nearly always one of these three cultures is predominant. Why an area exhibits a particular type of political culture reflects "the streams and currents of migration that have carried people of different origins and backgrounds across the continent in more or less orderly patterns" (229).

The individualistic political culture features a view of politics in democracies as constituting a "free marketplace," wherein the role of government is to be held to the very minimum required in order to "encourage private initiative and widespread access to the marketplace" (230). In this political culture, politics is dedicated to enhancing the success of individual needs. The moralistic political culture, in contrast, emphasizes the "positive potential" of politics, and sees the goal of political activity as "centered on some notion of the public good and properly devoted to the advancement of the public interest" (232). Citizens are expected to participate in political affairs, and there is an obligation to intervene in the activities of individuals if it is necessary to promote the public or common good. Finally, the traditionalistic political culture "...is rooted in an ambivalent attitude toward the marketplace coupled with a paternalistic and elitist conception of the commonwealth" (234). This political culture is dominated by elites whose primary goal is to maintain the existing social and political arrangements.

Where do the two major cities of Washington stand on the question of political culture when compared to other cities around the country? Table 1 presents Elazar's rating of Spokane and Seattle on each of the three major political culture dimensions, as well as the ratings he assigned to a group of other cities from around the country. Neither Seattle nor Spokane has any elements of the traditionalistic political culture, suggesting that there is an absence of any dominant force committed to sustaining the status quo through political activity. They differ from Atlanta in that regard, where traditional political values are the major theme of the culture. According to Elazar, Seattle has a minor strain of individualistic political culture, while the Spokane area has none at all. This might seem strange in the light of the popularly held view of Spokane as a more conservative city than Seattle, both in light of contemporary issues and in terms of historical events. But recall, Elazar is writing about the relative emphasis on the individual as opposed to the common good, and also that Seattle and Spokane really are quite similar in one important respect. The shared distinctiveness of Seattle and Spokane may be best expressed in their respective ratings on the dimension of *moralistic political culture.* The moralistic political culture is seen as the *sole* strain in Spokane, and as the major strain in Seattle. Recall that the term moralistic in this context does not refer to how "moral" the politics of the city are; rather, it refers to the relative emphasis placed on the common good as opposed to private interest. On this dimension, both Seattle and Spokane are more like the other Western cities of San Francisco, San Diego,

Table 1

Elazar Political Culture Types for Seattle and Spokane
and Selected other American Cities

City	Political Culture Types		
	Traditionalistic	Individualistic	Moralistic
SEATTLE	None	Minor	Major
SPOKANE	None	None	Sole
Atlanta	Major	Minor	None
Boston	None	None	Sole
Chicago	None	Major	Minor
Denver	None	None	Sole
Houston	Sole	None	None
Kansas City	None	Sole	None
Los Angeles	None	Minor	Major
Miami	None	Sole	None
Minneapolis	None	None	Sole
Sacramento	None	Minor	Major
Salt Lake City	None	None	Sole
San Diego	Minor	None	Major
San Francisco	None	Minor	Major
St. Louis	None	Sole	None

Source: Daniel J. Elazar, *The American Mosaic: The Impact of Space, Time, and Culture on American Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 242–43.

Sacramento, and Salt Lake City than they are like other cities across the country. For example, Seattle and Spokane differ greatly from Atlanta, Houston, Kansas City, and Miami.

Overall, then, the state's two major cities are similar in their dominant political cultures, and they are similar as well to other cities of the American West—and to Minneapolis, a city that lies in the same immigrant stream which moved across the northern reaches of the country. The political cultures of Washington's two major cities differ from many U.S. cities, especially those in the lower Midwest and the South.

Social Capital

One of the most important concepts in understanding the politics of a place is its level of social capital, itself based in the attitudes and values of citizens that constitute part of its political culture (Coleman 1990; Putnam 2000). Social capital has to do with the degree to which individuals trust each other, and assume good intentions on the part of others. If people trust each other they are more willing to join in social networks, and those social networks can be used to influence the character and the quality of their social and political environment. Individuals who trust other people are inclined to invest in interpersonal networks that benefit others because they have faith that those others can be trusted to reciprocate when the time comes that they are needed. This mutual trust binds people together in ways that allow them to exert greater collective influence than they would have individually. Many scholars argue that social capital is required to ensure democratic political practices featuring broad-based public involvement.

Some highly regarded observers of contemporary American society have argued that social capital is on the decline in America. Evidence of this decline is seen in a decrease in public involvement in political (e.g., voting) and social (civic organizations) activities, even those that are not explicitly political in form (Putnam 2000). Even such long-lived and highly revered organizations as the PTA have declined substantially in level of membership and range of activity. While some scholars dispute the claim that social capital is in decline (e.g., Ladd 1999), this apparent social trend is an important subject of study because major U.S. cities featuring higher levels of social capital tend to have higher quality city government services (Pierce et al. 2002) and feature higher quality health care services (Hendryx et al. 2002).

Table 2 displays scores for a number of U.S. cities on a measure of political and social trust expressed by their citizens. The higher the score, the higher is the level of trust, and thus the higher the level of social capital. Seattle's social capital score is among the highest of the cities listed, surpassed only by Minneapolis. Spokane's score, in contrast, is much lower than that of Seattle—although higher than a number of other major U.S. cities, such as Miami, Atlanta, and St. Louis. Hence, while Spokane and Seattle share a moralistic political culture, Seattle enjoys a higher level of social capital—and the concomitant higher levels of civic engagement and political participation.

Regional Differences on General Issues

Even within the metropolitan areas surrounding Seattle and Spokane, there may be significant differences among the communities and the kinds of political values held by their residents. One might expect, for example, the residents of Thurston County, the home of the state capital, to hold different attitudes than those of citizens in King County, the home of the state's largest city. Similarly, people in Spokane County can be expected to differ from King or Thurston county residents, and perhaps from the citizens of Kootenai County, Idaho, just a few miles across the border. Table 3 sets forth the percent of people agreeing

Table 2

Political and Social Trust Levels in Seattle and Spokane
Compared to Selected other American Cities

City	Trust Score
SEATTLE	205.75
SPOKANE	195.39
Atlanta	192.36
Boston	197.92
Chicago	199.01
Denver	200.86
Houston	176.06
Kansas City	184.66
Los Angeles	178.94
Miami	189.13
Minneapolis	210.08
Sacramento	190.90
Salt Lake City	205.16
San Diego	198.30
San Francisco	199.64
St. Louis	190.26

Source: Data for the calculation of political and social trust scores provided by the Leigh Stowell and Company market research firm of Seattle, Washington.

or strongly agreeing with a series of statements about contemporary public affairs in six counties in Washington, and one county in Idaho.

While there are some noteworthy differences among the residents of the different counties, all-in-all the gaps are not very substantial on most of the issues presented in Table 3. King County residents are least likely (32 percent) to say that "women's rights are receiving too much attention," while citizens who live in Snohomish Co., the home of Everett, are the most likely to agree with that statement (41 percent). Kootenai County, Idaho, residents are about in the middle of the distribution of the Washington State county results. Overall, it is clear that barely a third of the respondents in any county believe that the discussion of "women's rights" is getting too much attention.

On the question of whether "a few major corporations have all of the power," the percentage figures are much higher. In every county, well over half of the respondents believe that the country is run by major corporations. In Washington, the figure reaches as high as 66 percent in Thurston County, and the level is 68 percent in the Idaho Panhandle county of Kootenai. King Co. (54 percent)

Table 3

Country Differences in Public Opinion on Political and Social Issues*

Issue	County						
	King	Pierce	Snohomish	Kitsap	Thurston	Spokane	Kootenai (ID)
Women's rights receiving too much attention	32%	40%	41%	34%	36%	35%	36%
Few major corps have all power	54%	59%	55%	59%	66%	59%	68%
Public officials interested only in people with money	66%	61%	64%	70%	58%	65%	69%
Everything changing too fast	43%	52%	52%	43%	57%	45%	54%

*The entry in each cell is the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement along the side. Source: Leigh Stowell and Company market surveys of Seattle and Spokane.

and Snohomish Co. (55 percent) are close to each other, but even at that lower range more than half of the public agrees with the statement, reflecting pervasive political cynicism.

A related issue concerning who commands power in politics is raised by the statement: "Public officials are only interested in people with money." Nearly two-thirds of the respondents in the several counties agree with that cynical statement. In Kitsap Co. (Bremerton is the principal city), 70 percent of the citizens believe that people with money enjoy great advantage in contacting public officials, and in King Co. the comparable figure is 66 percent. On the other side of the Cascade Mountains, both the Spokane and the Kootenai samples are at the upper range of this cynical view of politics and of public officials. Indeed, the overall pattern confirms a broad belief that substantial distrust exists among American citizens about public officials.

Contemporary Americans indisputably live in a world of rapid economic, social, and technological change. Washington State is seen by many as being "on the leading edge" of that change, especially with the high technology elements of its economy in the Seattle area, and the social and cultural elements of its entrepreneurial prowess over the past two decades (e.g., Starbucks Coffee Houses spreading around the country, the ubiquitous presence of Microsoft in homes and offices across the country, and the popularity of the Seattle music scene). The residents of the several counties listed in Table 3 were asked the question of whether they agreed with the statement "everything is changing too fast." Ironically, perhaps, King and Kitsap county residents are least likely to agree that things are changing too fast, even though this is where most of the recent socioeconomic change has occurred. Citizens in Thurston Co. (57 percent) and in Kootenai Co. (54 percent) are the most resistant to the current pace of change.

Although not all regions of the state are included in these analyses, some worthwhile conclusions can indeed be tendered from this survey evidence. First, there are some regional differences in terms of the opinions their publics hold about important issues of politics. Second, substantial similarity exists across the Evergreen State in some respects; political cynicism is clearly the most important of those broadly shared perspectives on politics among contemporary Washingtonians.

Demographic Differences on General Issues

The body of research literature indicates that there is something important about a particular attribute such as gender or age or income that powerfully influences the way people view their political world. It may be that people in the same category, say under 40 years of age, have been subjected to the same forces of history (period effect), such as a war or a depression, and this shared experience

has caused them to think a certain way about some aspects of politics. Or it may be that people in a particular socio-economic or demographic category share a stake or political interest in a particular issue. For example, women may feel differently about abortion or other women's rights issues than do men, or they may feel differently than men about whether there should be a universal draft for young men. Similarly, wealthy citizens tend to be more interested in capital gains tax reductions than are working class people. Tables 4–6 display the results of a survey of citizens in the Seattle area on a series of contemporary political issues, contrasting respondents by race/ethnicity, income, and gender.

Table 4

Racial/Ethnicity Differences in Opinions on Selected Political Issues*

Issue	Race/Ethnicity				
	White	Black	Native American	Asian American	Multi-cultural
Women's rights are receiving too much attention	38%	21%	31%	27%	44%
All young men should serve in the military	33%	27%	40%	31%	33%
Public officials only listen to people with money	60%	63%	71%	53%	52%
Politics is interesting	55%	53%	37%	50%	66%
A few major corporations hold all of the power	56%	61%	74%	51%	59%
Too many people are getting a free ride	66%	54%	69%	70%	71%

*The data are for the Seattle area public only. The entry in each column is the percentage agreeing with the statement. The white category of race/ethnicity includes Hispanic/Latino citizens.

On the issue of whether "women's rights issues are receiving too much attention," the least agreement is found among African Americans (21 percent), followed by Asian Americans (27 percent) and Native Americans (31 percent). The white survey respondents (38 percent) were nearly twice as likely as black respondents to agree with the statement. It is possible that these minority respondents are more sensitive to equity issues for historically disadvantaged groups in the population, and they are inclined to empathize with other disadvantaged groups. On most of the other issues, the racial/ethnic groups' opinions wrap around those of white Washingtonians, with the latter usually being someplace in the middle. Moreover, the differences among the non-white groups are sometimes quite substantial. Thus, for example, while only 53 percent of the Asian Americans polled believe that public officials only listen to people with money, fully 71 percent of the Native American respondents express that belief.

Table 5 displays the issue opinions of Washington residents of different income levels, contrasting those above and below $40,000 annual incomes. In most cases the opinions held are rather similar, save for several noteworthy issues. Perhaps not unexpectedly, people in families with annual incomes below $40,000 are more likely to believe that "public officials are interested only in people with money." Likewise, they are more likely to believe that "corporations have all of the power." On the other hand, they differ very little on questions of women's rights, or universal male military service, or whether people are unfairly getting a free ride on the efforts of others.

Table 6 compares the opinions of men and women in Washington State on this same set of general political questions. Rather surprisingly, there are no significant male/female differences on the question of women's rights, nor on most of the other issues posed. The policy area where the biggest opinion differences between men and women arises appears in regard to military service. When asked whether "all young men should serve in the military" women are much less likely than men to support that statement (24% compared to 40%). Perhaps that difference is the result of women generally being seen as less supportive of military service and military action than men.

The Public Agenda

One of the most important functions of the public in a democracy is to define the problems and issues that those in decision-making positions should confront.

Table 5

Income Differences in Opinions on Selected Political Issues*

	Income	
	Above $40,000	Below $40,000
Women's rights are receiving too much attention	35%	35%
All young men should serve in the military	35%	30%
Public officials are interested only in people with money	53%	63%
Politics is interesting to me	62%	52%
Corporations have all of the power	48%	62%
Too many people are getting a free ride	38%	35%

*The results are Seattle area data only. The entry in each column is the percentage agreeing with the statement. Source: Leigh Stowell and Company market research firm, Seattle.

Table 6

Gender Differences in Opinions on Selected Political and Social Issues*

	Gender	
	Male	Female
Women's rights are receiving too much attention	36%	35%
All young men should serve in the military	40%	24%
Most public officials are only interested in people with money	61%	59%
Politics is interesting to me	58%	51%
A few major corporations have all of the power	54%	58%
Too many people are getting a free ride	70%	61%

*The results are Seattle area data only. The entry in each column is the percentage agreeing with the statement. Source: Leigh Stowell and Company market research firm, Seattle.

While citizens may not have the time or the relevant knowledge required to participate directly in the resolution of those policy questions, they can identify what they believe to be the appropriate topics that ought to be placed on the agenda for policymaker attention and public discussion.

A recent survey of citizens in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho asked respondents to indicate what they felt to be the most important problems facing their respective communities. Are Washington residents different in the problems they identify as pressing than their neighbors to the East and to the South? The findings displayed in Table 7 provide a partial answer to that question. That table sets forth the percent of respondents from each of the states that identified four specific areas as "major problems" concerning their respective communities. Each area represents a mix of related concerns that are combined into a single category. For example, the area of "crime" includes concerns with victimization, gangs, drugs, violence, and police misconduct. It should be noted that the totals in the table do not add to 100 percent because some people did not identify one or more of the major problem areas listed as affecting their community.

In only one area are Washington citizens particularly distinctive from their neighbors in the degree to which they see some issues as major problems. While Washington citizens are a little more likely than those from Oregon to see crime

Table 7

Public Perceptions of Most Important Problems Facing the Community:
Washington Compared to Oregon and Idaho*

	State		
	Washington	Oregon	Idaho
Problem Area			
Crime[a]	21%	18%	19%
Growth[b]	34%	30%	33%
Economic[c]	5%	4%	4%
Quality of Public Life[d]	7%	14%	20%

*The entry in each cell is the percentage of the respective state publics identifying the problem area as the most important problem facing the respondent's community.

[a]Includes crime, safety, gangs, drugs, violence and police.

[b]Includes growth, growing too fast, over-development, infrastructure, traffic, population growth, new people-outsiders, immigrants.

[c]Includes housing, economy, cost of living, property values, jobs.

[d]Includes quality of life, small town atmosphere, schools, health care, social services, lack of youth activities, environment, pollution.

Source: Elway Research, Inc. for the *Seattle Times*/Northwest Cable News Poll, 2000.

as a problem, and to view population growth as a problem, they are substantially less likely than people from either Oregon or Idaho to mention a decline in the quality of public life as a major problem. From this perspective, then, the Washington public might be seen to be more satisfied with the overall quality of life in their state than are residents of Oregon and Idaho. On the other hand, the case may be that, though concerned about the quality of life, Washington residents find other issues to resonate more deeply with them, causing quality of life concerns to be somewhat understated. A partial answer to the question is found in results displayed in Table 8. This table reports the percentage of respondents in the three states believing that progress is being made in enhancing the overall quality of life in their state.

Table 8

Percent Saying Progress is Being Made in Various Areas:
Washington, Oregon, and Idaho Publics*

	State		
Areas of Progress	Washington	Oregon	Idaho
Overall Quality of Life	67%	72%	76%
Air and Water Quality	65%	63%	66%
Transportation	41%	57%	49%
A Place of Opportunity	67%	65%	72%
Race Relations	72%	66%	66%
Social and Health Needs	71%	70%	72%
Local Economy	72%	72%	70%
Affordable Housing	37%	43%	46%
Entertainment/Recreation	73%	73%	68%
A Place to Raise a Family	82%	82%	84%
Sense of Community	66%	75%	80%
Crime	57%	61%	58%
Education	65%	55%	58%

*The entry in each cell is the percent saying that progress is being made in the community in that particular area.

Source: Source: Elway Research, Inc. for the *Seattle Times*/Northwest Cable News Poll, 2000.

Contrary to what one might have concluded from Table 7, the results in Table 8 indicate clearly that Washington residents are less satisfied than those from the other two states concerning progress being made toward enhancing the overall quality of life in the state. But, it is noteworthy that even though Washingtonians are somewhat less likely to agree that overall progress is being

made, still two-thirds of them are on the positive side of the question. On most of the issues listed, the citizens of the three states are close to each other in their view of progress, and likely to believe that progress is being made. However, there are several issue areas that are exceptions to the general rule.

For example, Washingtonians are much less likely than Oregonians to believe that progress is being made in the area of transportation—no doubt reflecting the now legendary magnitude of traffic congestion in the Puget Sound area. Washington residents are less likely to believe that progress is being made on the provision of affordable housing; barely a third of the Washington survey respondents feel progress has taken place. Washington residents also are less likely than those from either Oregon or Idaho to see progress being made in the area of sustaining "a sense of community" where they live. There are some policy areas, however, where Washingtonians are somewhat more likely to see progress being made—namely, those of education and race relations.

Participation in local community activities is one way in which citizens can give active voice to their opinions. High levels of community participation reflect high social capital, the kind of networking that allows citizens to exercise influence on the character of their local community. Table 9 displays the percent of respondents reporting active participation in community activities in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

The level of overall involvement by the Washington public is only slightly greater than that of Oregon, but substantially less than that of Idaho. The Idaho public is more likely to participate in community political activities and

community social events, and to contact a public official. These differences may reflect the small-town nature of Idaho's population, where the community tends to be closer to the individual than is the case in the more highly urbanized states of Washington and Oregon.

What kinds of differences are obtained among Washington residents regarding their involvement in community activities? Table 10 shows the answer to that question in terms of individual attributes that often have been used to explain participation levels. The first is the level of education the individual has attained. As frequently is found in research on American political behavior, the participation level of Washingtonians is clearly differentiated by level of educational attainment. For example, Washingtonians who have attended graduate school average 3.3 acts of involvement, compared to only 2.3 by those who progressed no farther than high school. Similarly, individuals of color are less likely to be involved in community activities than are the non-minority citizens of the state. On the other hand, there are no differences between men and women in the Washington public with regard to their level of community involvement.

People who live in different parts of Washington often compare themselves, usually favorably, to those who live in other regions of the state. Do they differ in terms of their level of community involvement? The answer is yes. Residents of eastern Washington and those who live in central Puget Sound (Pierce and

Table 9

Percent Reporting Participation in Community Activities
Washington, Oregon, and Idaho Publics*

Community Activity	State		
	Washington	Oregon	Idaho
Community Political Activity	39%	40%	46%
Contribution to Charity	88%	82%	88%
Community Social Event	61%	60%	73%
Contacted Public Official	29%	30%	39%
Volunteered Time	62%	58%	65%
Average Involvement Index	2.78	2.69	3.11

*The entry in each cell is the percent saying they engaged in that particular community activity. The involvement index is the number of activities in which the individual reports being involved. The index ranges from 0 to 5.

Source: Source: Elway Research, Inc. for the *Seattle Times*/Northwest Cable News Poll, 2000.

Table 10

Average Levels of Community Involvement in the Washington State Public within Various Personal Demographic Categories*

Education	High School	Some College	College	Graduate School
	2.28	2.82	3.04	3.30
Gender	*Male*	*Female*		
	2.79	2.77		
Region	*King Co.*	*Puget Sound*	*Western Wa.*	*Eastern Wa.*
	2.66	2.92	2.57	2.96
Race	*White*	*Non-White*		
	2.86	2.22		
Home	*Yes*	*No*		
Internet Use	3.03	2.44		

*The entry in each cell is the average number of community activities in which the individual respondent participated, with a maximum of five and a minimum of zero.

Source: Source: Elway Research, Inc. for the *Seattle Times*/Northwest Cable News Poll, 2000.

Snohomish counties) are more likely to be involved in community activities than are those who live in King County and other parts of western Washington.

Finally, Table 10 shows the relationship of home Internet use to community involvement. Internet users are much more likely to participate in other community activities than those who do not enjoy such use. This is an important finding because there is considerable disagreement in the academic and popular literature on the relationship between Internet use and involvement in traditional community activities and networks (Katz and Rice 2002). Some social observers have argued that attachment to the technology involved in Internet use diverts individuals from their traditional personal connections and social networks. The singular focus on the desktop computer is hypothesized by some commentators to alienate individuals from their community. On the other hand, other scholars and social commentators argue that use of the Internet from home is a new way to reinforce traditional networks, albeit through an unconventional medium. The kinds of people who possess the resources to own and employ computer technology in the home are also people with individual attributes which typically lead them into community involvement. In particular, as we saw earlier, higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of community involvement, and both traits are associated with higher levels of Internet use.

Table 11 shows that Internet use is associated with differences in involvement on *each* of the community activities listed, albeit some more than others. In this table, the entry is an average score, where 1 is involvement in the activity and 2 is no involvement. Hence, the higher the score, the lower the level of involvement. These findings show that Internet users are more likely to go to political meetings in their community, to contribute to charities, to attend

Table 11

Average Level of Washington Public's Community Involvement
in Specific Activities, within Internet Use*

	Internet Use	
Community Involvement Activity	Yes	No
Community Political Meeting	1.55	1.76
Contribution to Charity	1.10	1.21
Community Social Event	1.35	1.48
Contacted Public Official	1.65	1.90
Volunteered	1.31	1.51

*The entry in each cell represents the level of involvement in the particular community involvement activity for Internet users and for Internet non-users. A lower number indicates higher level of involvement.

community social events, to contact public officials about their concerns, and to volunteer for community service. If anything, the use of the Internet may facilitate involvement in the local community for persons who are already inclined to do so, rather than displace those other traditional forms of civic engagement.

Government Performance

One of the most widely noted patterns in public opinion in recent decades is a significant decline in American citizens' confidence in the effectiveness of government performance (Putnam 2000). This troubling trend serves to undermine the capacity of government to address shared concerns, such as traffic congestion, environmental quality, public safety, and homeland security. It depresses the willingness of citizens to participate, along with their state and local governments, in collective activities intended to make their communities better places to live. This decline in willingness to engage in what are called *co-production activities* is revealed in such trends as a significant drop in contributions to United Way, declining donations of blood to the Red Cross and food to local food banks, lower participation in public safety programs such as Block Watch, and less joining of commuter-trip reduction programs to reduce traffic congestion.

Not all state government activities are viewed in the same light by Washingtonians. Some state government efforts are seen as being more effective in accomplishing public interest goals than others. Table 12 sets forth findings on how Washingtonians graded six distinct activities of state government that collectively make up the majority of the Evergreen State's budget. The survey findings

Table 12

Public Grades Given to the Performance of Different
Washington Government Activities

Activity	Grade assigned, by percent surveyed						
	A	B	C	D	F	DK*	GPA
Colleges and Universities	9	40	31	9	3	8	2.46
Natural Resources and Environment	10	35	34	13	5	4	2.34
Prisons	7	20	30	12	7	25	2.11
Public Schools	5	30	41	12	9	3	2.10
Social and Health Services	5	24	35	23	10	4	1.93
Transportation and Highways	4	16	25	33	21	1	1.47

* Don't Know
Source: Elway Research, Inc. Topline Data, June 3-6, 2002.

ings indicate that Washington's public colleges and universities are seen as doing a good job of meeting their responsibilities, with only 12% of the public awarding them poor grades of D or F. Natural Resources and Environmental Protection agencies do almost as well, receiving an average grade of 2.34 (grade of C). In contrast, Prisons (Department of Corrections) receive barely a C average at 2.11, as do public schools at 2.10. Even worse, Social and Health Services get a 1.93 average grade (D+), and the area of Transportation and Highways rates only a 1.47; over half of the public gives this area a D or F grade.

Conclusion

The citizens of Washington are inclined to have high expectations for their state government and their political leaders. The state's moralistic political culture invites these high expectations. This political culture was brought to Washington by its early settlers, and this perspective on politics was reflected in—and received reinforcement from—the Populist and Progressive reform movements which swept across the American West at the turn of the century. This same moralistic political culture continues in strong force today. As the following chapters will reveal, the moralistic political culture is reflected in the way in which political parties operate in the state, how interest groups have been both accommodated and regulated, how the initiative process has come to occupy a major role in the policy process, and how the major political institutions of state and local government have taken shape and tend to operate and interact.

Although the expectations of government entertained by Washingtonians tend to be rather high, their collective assessment of the current level of performance of the state's governmental institutions is quite low. Whether in regard to the resolution of Puget Sound traffic problems, the performance of public schools, the restoration of historic salmon runs, or providing affordable housing and health care coverage to the state's most disadvantaged citizens, the state's governmental institutions receive rather poor marks from their citizens. More vexing problems, such as reform of the state's inadequate and inequitable revenue and taxation system or broadening economic development beyond the congested Puget Sound region, seem beyond the reach of state and local government officials. Politics in the Evergreen State seem to be increasingly less deliberative and visionary, and more and more the subject of the fits and starts of temporary trends and fads. The less desirable unanticipated consequences of the state's deep Populist and Progressive roots have become increasingly evident in the frequent use of the initiative process to redirect public policies duly established by the deliberative work of esteemed commissions, the state legislature, and the governor.

The Evergreen State has come to a major crossroads in its history. One of its major employers, the Boeing Corporation, has moved its corporate headquarters away to Chicago. The state's major extractive industries—logging, mining and fishing—will never again attain their former levels of production. The "cheap power" available to industry and households alike in the past will no longer be present. The "dot com" boom of the 1990s became a bust in the early 2000s. Two former governors—a Democrat and a Republican—came out of retirement to attempt to rescue the state's higher education system from a decade-long decline in state support with an initiative to raise money for badly needed capital improvements. A blue-ribbon task force on tax reform headed by Bill Gates Sr. has proposed anew an income tax to balance out what it believes to be the state's seriously regressive and inefficient public revenue system. Will these and similar efforts by the state's opinion leaders succeed, or will the state's political institutions continue to disappoint the state's citizens? The chapters to follow will provide reasons for both optimism and concern in this regard. The Evergreen State has constructed an enviable governmental apparatus and legal superstructure, featuring some of the most progressive aspects of state government in the country. Its state and local agencies are generally staffed with first-rate career officials, well-educated and richly experienced to an uncommon degree. Despite these valuable assets, Washington's leaders and citizens nontheless face a considerable number of difficult challenges—items of unfinished business of democratic governance—in the years ahead. Only time will tell if Washington's governmental and community leaders can rise to the challenges facing them, and whether the state's citizens will do their part to support timely reforms and innovations.

References

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Coleman, James S. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.

Compaine, Benjamin M. 2001. *The Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth?* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper and Row.

Elazar, Daniel J. 1994. *The American Mosaic: The Impact of Space, Time, and Culture on American Politics.* Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

Greenstein, Fred I. 1965. *Children and Politics.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Hendryx, Michael S., Melissa M. Ahern, Nicholas P. Lovrich, and Arthur M. McCurdy. 2002. "Access to Health Care and Community Social Capital." *Health Services Research* 35: 307–18.

Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1975. "Continuity and Change in Political Orientations: A Longitudinal Study of Two Generations." *The American Political Science Review* 18: 1316–35.

Katz, James E., and Ronald E. Rice. 2002. *Social Consequences of Internet Use: Access, Involvement, and Interaction.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Key, Jr., V.O. 1965. *Public Opinion and American Democracy.* New York: Knopf.

Ladd, Everett Carll. 1999. *The Ladd Report.* New York: The Free Press.

Luttbeg, Norman R. 1974. "Political Linkage in a Large Society." In *Public Opinion and Public Policy* (rev. edition), ed. Norman R. Luttbeg. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey.

Pierce, John C., Kathleen M. Beatty, and Paul R. Hagner. 1982. *The Dynamics of American Public Opinion: Patterns and Processes.* Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Pierce, John C., Nicholas P. Lovrich, Jr., and C. David Moon. 2002. "Social Capital and Government Performance: An Analysis of 20 American Cities." *Public Performance and Management Review* 25: 381–97.

Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Sniderman, Paul M. 1975. *Personality and Democratic Politics.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chapter Two

Washington State Parties

Andrew Appleton and Ashley Grosse

Introduction

POLITICAL PARTIES IN WASHINGTON STATE have been characterized as historically and comparatively weak at the organizational level (Appleton and Deporter 1996). Prior to the modern era, party organizational development was restrained by two peculiarities that came to symbolize the uniqueness of the state at some level—namely, the "blanket primary" and the absence of party registration. Coupled with a weak set of laws regulating party finance and campaign spending, the party system in Washington State before the modern era remained perhaps less developed at an organizational level than party systems in many other states.

However, in the intervening period, two broad sets of changes have taken place in the environment surrounding the party organizations themselves that have catalyzed party development in the state. First, Washington has become a truly competitive state where the control of the state legislature, prominent statewide offices, and the composition of the federal congressional delegation have become intense fields of struggle for the major parties (Beck 1997, 37). Second, there have been challenges and changes to the legal regime within which the parties operate, most notably in the areas of campaign finance and the primary system.

Scholars have noticed the reinforcing effect that modified rules governing campaign finance have had on state parties. The growing salience of the "soft" versus "hard" money distinction under federal (and many state) rules actually served to recenter state party organizations in the election campaign process, and to cement their key position in the service-vendor model of the new political party. Exempt from many of the restrictions placed on national party