ELITE MESSAGES AND PUBLIC OPINION: 
THE CASE OF THE OHIO SUPREME COURT

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Courts must have significant public support in order to be effective policymakers. The study of support for courts long has been a focus of research by political scientists, and we know much about the levels and correlates of support for the U.S. Supreme Court. However, only recently has scholarly research focused on the question of support for state and local courts. Consequently, scholars know much less about how support operates for these courts. Research on state and local courts is further hindered by the lack of a theory of support for courts.

This research focuses on the concepts of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. It draws upon two existing theoretical frameworks and creates a new, hybrid framework that is able to explain the importance of support for courts. The framework also articulates plausible mechanisms by which judgments of support are formed and changed over time. New survey data is used to provide information on the levels and correlates of diffuse and specific support for courts. A unique survey-based experiment was used to assess the influence of elite messages on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

This research found that the Ohio Supreme Court enjoys generally high levels of diffuse and specific support, and that the presence of a significant political controversy did not appear to change those levels of support substantially. It identifies a number of
significant demographic and attitudinal correlates of support, including political knowledge and educational attainment. The research also found that elite messages could influence support for the court; however, limitations in the research design made it impossible to test the strength and direction of this influence.

This research also looked at patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court on three separate measures—diffuse support, specific support, and support for the court’s decision in the 2001 DeRolph v. State of Ohio case. It found that respondents’ judgments of support could be categorized into three primary patterns, and identified a number of significant predictors of those patterns. Computer simulations were used to provide a measure of effect size for each of the predictors, and simulations revealed that in some cases a substantial change in a single predictor variable could result in a sizeable change in the probabilities of respondents expressing that pattern of support.
To Grandma and Grandpa McLeod
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and adventures outside of the classroom. I am especially grateful to my grandparents, who taught me a lot about the meaning of life and the value of education, who always provided a safe haven for me, and who always pushed me to be the absolute best I could be—regardless of whether my pursuit was in or outside of the classroom. Quite simply, I would not be the person I am today without them.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Courts and Public Support

Courts must have significant public support in order to be effective policymakers. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter captured this sentiment well when he said, “The Court’s authority—possessed of neither the purse nor the sword—ultimately rests on sustained public confidence in its moral sanction” (Caldeira 319). Although this sentiment was directed toward the U.S. Supreme Court, we can expect that it is as—if not even more--relevant to state courts, as many judges in state and local courts not only influence policy with their decisions but also must survive periodic electoral contests. Political scientists and students of the judiciary long have recognized the importance of public support for courts and have studied support for courts for years. Much of this research has focused on the U.S. Supreme Court and on understanding the relationships between various types of support identified by scholars in their work.

My dissertation studies support for a less visible state-level court, the Ohio Supreme Court, as it was in the midst of a very controversial series of decisions that overturned Ohio’s school funding system and directed the state legislature to develop a new, more egalitarian funding system. I use new data to describe and explain levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court and to investigate demographic and attitudinal correlates of this support. I also use data from a unique survey-based experiment to explore the conditions of support for the court and how framing the
decisions can affect it. More specifically, I have tested whether elite messages can influence how much support members of the public express for the Ohio Supreme Court, and whether John Zaller’s (1992) one-message and two-message models of elite-mass communication accurately characterize the influence of elite messages on support for the court.

This chapter introduces the theoretical and empirical context of this research question and links public support for the Ohio Supreme Court’s decisions in the school funding controversy to the public and political legitimacy of the Ohio Supreme Court as an institution. The chapter also provides a limited history of the Ohio Supreme Court as a political institution, along with a brief description of the research design used to test my core hypothesis, and a brief explanation of how this document is organized.

The Ohio Supreme Court and School Funding

Because my research began just as the court was hearing a landmark case on the constitutionality of Ohio’s system for funding public schools in Ohio and because my dissertation takes advantage of the school funding controversy as a natural experiment, I begin with a brief discussion of the court’s school funding decisions and their impact on the state legislature and the larger political system in Ohio.

The controversy surrounding Ohio’s system of funding K-12 public schools began with a 1991 lawsuit that challenged Ohio’s system of funding public schools on the ground that it did not fulfill its constitutional duty to provide a “…thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state” (Ohio Constitution Article VI, section 2). Judge Linton Lewis, a state trial judge in Perry County, found that the state’s school
funding system was unconstitutional because it relied disproportionately on local property taxes. Under the state’s then-current funding system, most funding for K-12 public schools came from property taxes in local communities, meaning that districts with higher property values were able to generate more local revenue than poorer districts. Lewis found that this system resulted in disparate educational opportunities across districts, providing school districts in wealthy suburban areas with high levels of funding, but leaving many school districts in inner-city and Appalachian areas of the state badly underfunded. Even if tax rates were high in these poorer districts, many of them still could not raise as much money as their wealthier counterparts.

Lewis ordered the state to comprehensively revise the state’s funding system, a move that was hailed by education officials in “poor” districts but regardless favorably by officials in wealthier districts. However, that ruling was reversed by Ohio’s 5th District Court of Appeals in 1995, which found that the level of school funding was a legislative question and not a judicial one, meaning that in their view the state court system had no jurisdiction over the state’s school funding system (“A Decade of Litigation”). In 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court issued a decision on the case which sided with the trial court and which found that Ohio’s system for funding public education was unconstitutional. As part of the decision, the court gave the state legislature one year to develop a new funding system that provided a “thorough and efficient” system of education for all students in Ohio, and returned jurisdiction and oversight of the case to Judge Linton Lewis.

Not surprisingly, this ruling created a huge political problem for the state legislature, in that a large tax increase seemed necessary to bring the funding system into compliance with the court ruling. The legislature was unwilling to raise taxes in an
election year and instead asked voters to approve a one cent increase in the state sales tax, with that additional revenue being earmarked for public schools. The proposed sales tax increase was soundly defeated by voters in May, 1998, and in the wake of the defeat, the state made minor changes to the school funding system and increased the amount of state aid and loans available to school districts for building and renovation programs. The state then submitted the revised plan to the court system for an evaluation of the constitutionality of the new funding plan.

In February 1999, Judge Linton Lewis, the same judge who decided the original school funding case in 1991, ruled that the state had not complied with the Ohio Supreme Court’s order for a “complete, systemic overhaul” of the school funding system. The state appealed the case to the Ohio Supreme Court and in May of 2000 the court concurred with Lewis’ decision in a 4-3 vote, finding that the revised school funding arrangements remained unconstitutional. As before, the court system reserved jurisdiction on the case and gave the state another year to revise the school funding plan and resubmit it to the court for review.

The court’s decision put the state legislature in a difficult position, in that it again was an election year and state legislators again feared that they would need to raise taxes to comply with the state’s ruling. The state legislature decided not to take action related to the court ruling until after the November 2000 election and formed a committee following the election to study the ruling and to formulate a new plan that the Ohio Supreme Court would accept. During the next six months, the state legislature worked feverishly to develop a plan that would meet the court’s guidelines without requiring a statewide tax increase. In the end, the state legislature crafted a plan that increased
funding for public K-12 schools by $1.4 billion dollars per year and which based the state’s funding formula on the unweighted average cost per student of public education in 127 school districts that met 20 of 27 of the state’s performance guidelines in fiscal year 1999, thereby boosting state aid per student to $4,814 for fiscal year 2001-2002 (Candinsky A1). Furthermore, the state developed a system of “parity aid” that would be phased in over five years. Parity aid was designed to provide additional funding to school districts that historically had been resource poor, in an effort to address disparities between wealthier and poorer school districts (Candinsky A1). Moreover, the state’s funding plan provided additional funds to all school districts for transportation, special education, and vocational education (Candinsky A1). The state also significantly increased funding available to school districts for construction and renovation of school facilities. This increased level of state support of public school districts was implemented without increasing state taxes; instead, the state’s fiscal year (FY) 2001-2002 budget kept virtually all state departments at the same funding level as during FY 2000-2001 and thus freed up resources to provide this higher level of support for public schools.

Unfortunately, at the time that the state developed its FY 2001-2002 budget, the state economy was slowing and tax receipts had begun to drop. This caused the state to miss the budget targets it developed and spurred the state legislature to pass mid-year budget cuts that “recaptured” money previously allocated to state departments, agencies, and higher education. These mid-year cuts were controversial and elected officials openly admitted that the cuts were the only way that the state would be able to keep its funding commitment to K-12 education.
The state submitted its new plan to the Ohio Supreme Court in early June of 2001 for their review. Somewhat unusually, the high court’s review process in the 2001 DeRolph case resembled a trial court’s fact-finding mission in that the high court re-reviewed all of the evidence submitted by both sides and held new oral arguments on the case on June 20, 2001. The difficulty of the ruling and the magnitude of the court’s review process becomes clear in that it was not until September 6, 2001 that the Court issued a ruling on the case—almost two months after the new plan was initially submitted to the court. In a 4-3 decision, the court ruled that the new funding plan was still unconstitutional, but in a rare effort to end the decade-long court battle, it provided clear instructions to the state legislature on how to make the system constitutional. The court ruled that the new system of school funding would be constitutional if the state did two things: first, change the formula it used to determine the basic state aid that districts received so that the minimum state aid per pupil was increased from $4,814 per year to $5,145 per year; second, speed up the full implementation of parity aid such that the program would be fully funded by July, 2003 (DeRolph v. State, 2001). Additionally, the court strongly encouraged the state to review its building program and to consider any alternative arrangements that would increase the amount of money available to local school districts for building and renovation programs.

The unusual nature of the court’s decision brought heated reactions and disappointment from parties on both sides of the issue. In one particularly vocal and high profile critique of the decision, Republican state senator Jim Jordan said, “It’s ridiculous…Frankly, we should tell the court we’re not going to do it…. [and] put it back in their lap” (Hershey and Bischoff B1). William Phillis, the executive director of the
coalition of schools supporting reform had a different criticism of the decision. As he said, the decision, “…defines what amounts to a constitutional minimum. These decisions have changed a deficient system to one that I would call somewhat mediocre” (Hershey and Bischoff B1).

On September 17, 2001, Governor Bob Taft asked the Ohio Supreme Court to reconsider its ruling, arguing that a sluggish state economy and declining tax receipts made it impossible for the state to afford the funding increases mandated by the ruling (Rowland A3). The Ohio Supreme Court responded to this request on December 13, 2001, by appointing a mediator to negotiate a settlement between coalition members and the state (Rowland A3). Although the mediator, Howard S. Bellman, had extensive experience mediating settlements in school funding cases, he was unable to make significant progress with either the state or the coalition of schools and terminated settlement negotiations on March 21, 2002 (Rowland A3). At this point, the case reverted back to the Ohio Supreme Court for a ruling on Governor Taft’s request for reconsideration of the court’s ruling the 2001 DeRolph v. State case.

On December 11, 2002, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled in DeRolph v. State, 2002, that the state’s school funding system remained unconstitutional and ordered the state legislature to make the system compliant with the state constitution’s “thorough and efficient” clause (Rowland A1, A3). Strikingly, the court did not provide a deadline for the changes and it relinquished jurisdiction in the case, meaning that the DeRolph v. State cases essentially was finished. Although the coalition of schools saw the ruling as a positive outcome, Governor Taft announced that the state did not have to make further changes and that the court’s ruling merely offered “ideas or hints or suggestions” the state
could use as it continued to improve the school funding system (Rowland A1). The state’s position provoked heated reactions from political elites and even from the Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, Thomas Moyer. As he said, “They can’t say, ‘do nothing.’ They have the Supreme Court of the state that says the school funding plan is unconstitutional” (Rowland A1).

At this writing, the state has not made any further changes to the funding system, with the exception that shrinking tax revenues forced the state to scale back per-pupil funding increases scheduled in the funding system it proposed to the court in 2001. The state’s refusal to make the more comprehensive changes required by the court in DeRolph v. State, 2002 and its inability to sustain the funding increases it proposed in its 2001 funding plan left members of the coalition of schools considering further litigation. As of August 2003, no additional litigation has been announced.

It is in this context of controversy that the present research effort looks at the question of support. As will be described further below and in subsequent chapters, the data used in the analyses were collected during July and August of 2001—at a time when interest in how the court would rule on the 2001 DeRolph v. State case was high and when political elites on both sides of the issue were very vocal about the impact of a variety of potential decisions the court could have made.

Although the Ohio Supreme Court has a history of issuing rulings on a variety of controversial cases and issues of public policy, its decisions and actions in the school funding cases are unique. First, from a separation of powers perspective, the DeRolph cases have involved a conservative state supreme court repeatedly striking down funding plans created by and promoted by a conservative state legislature and a conservative
Governor. Moreover, by retaining jurisdiction of the cases, the Ohio Supreme Court has functioned in some respects as a legislative body that sought to ensure that the state legislature and Governor complied with its rulings. These very unusual aspects of the cases by themselves created a significant amount of elite discourse.

Because the case involved an issue that directly influenced many Ohio residents, we can expect that citizens paid significantly more attention to these decisions on the school funding case (and to elite discourse on the case) than they would to virtually any other outputs from the court. Thus, if elite messages can influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court, we should be most likely to see that type of influence in this context.

Even though the nature of Ohio’s school funding case may be unique from substantive and research perspectives, the problem of school funding is anything but unique to Ohio. Since the mid-1970’s, seventeen other states have had their systems of funding K-12 education declared unconstitutional by state court systems (Lundberg 2000). Nationwide controversy surrounding state school funding arrangements began in the late 1960’s, after Arthur Wise published his landmark book, Rich Schools, Poor Schools: The Promise of Equal Education Opportunity (Bosworth 28). Wise’s book outlined the many inequalities inherent in a property tax-based funding system and argued strongly that these inequalities constituted a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment right of citizens to “equal protection under the laws” (Bosworth 29). In one of the first decisions of its type, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in 1972 that New Jersey’s arrangement for funding public schools was unconstitutional under a clause in the state constitution requiring New Jersey to provide a “thorough and efficient” education for its citizens (Tarr and Porter 216, Bosworth 244).
More recently, other states, such as Vermont, New Hampshire, Texas, Kentucky, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Michigan have struggled to comply with state court rulings that required a new, more equitable system of funding public education in these states. Although the New Jersey case still has not been resolved as of this writing, each of the other states eventually adopted new plans that met each state’s standard of constitutionality. Each state solved its funding crisis differently; for example, Michigan generated the necessary revenue for its new funding plan by increasing the state sales tax and capping property taxes, while Vermont developed a plan that replaced much of the local systems of property taxes with a statewide property tax that was devoted exclusively to education and distributed equitably across the state. Of note, the Texas school funding case—much like Ohio’s case—went through the state court system multiple times (five cases and three new funding plans in the space of five years) before the state developed a plan that addressed the court’s concerns about equality (Bosworth 59). This plan, which required a substantial tax increase and intense bargaining between the court, the governor, and the state legislature, paradoxically has been found to be the most progressive and equal funding system in the nation (Bosworth 60).

The Ohio Supreme Court as a Political Institution

In addition to having a very significant role in Ohio’s school funding controversy, the Ohio Supreme Court historically has played an important and multi-faceted role in the Ohio politics. For that reason it is important to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the court as a political institution. As Ohio’s highest and only statewide court, the Ohio Supreme Court each year makes a variety of important decisions on a wide range of
criminal and civil cases. Not surprisingly, these decisions often have direct impact on state law and in many instances have significant influence on the agenda and actions of state policymakers. As can be expected, the court’s decisions occasionally have caused conflict between the court and other political institutions in Ohio. However, despite the centrality of the court to the political process in Ohio, the precise role of the court in the political process and its salience to the public has varied greatly during much of the court’s recent history.

Electoral contests for seats on the court serve well as one illustration of how the court’s role has varied over time. Ohio has a unique hybrid selection system for court elections that requires candidates first to run in a partisan primary but then to be elected in a non-partisan general contest (Tarr and Porter 126). During the 1974-80 period, most electoral contests for the court were not salient to the public or to the media and displayed generally low levels of controversy. The court remained solidly Republican for most of this period, incumbent justices were successful in defeating challengers in 84 percent of the contests, and the highest level of spending by a candidate during this period was just $72,000 (Baum 288-291). This period by and large can be characterized as one of non-controversial electoral contests that maintained a conservative status quo on the court.

However, the character of electoral contests for the Ohio Supreme Court began to change in 1978 with the establishment of a Democratic majority and the election of Democratic Chief Justice Frank Celebreze (Tarr and Porter 128). The court, not surprisingly, began to be more liberal on economic and civil liberties issues, and this doctrinal shift was greeted with strong opposition from business groups and other constituencies whose interests had been served well by the court in the past. This
opposition and controversy was reflected in elections to the court, inasmuch as during this time candidates began to spend more on their campaigns for the court, the media paid increasing amounts of attention to court elections, and issues—especially economic issues and issues of judicial policy and philosophy—began to play a larger role in campaigns for the court (Baum 291). In fairness, this higher level of attention also was due in part to controversy caused by the personal behavior of then Chief Justice Celebreeze. In 1982, he had a very public fight with the Ohio Bar Association after he learned that the Bar had started an official investigation of possible ethical violations as a result of his failed 1981 candidacy for governor (Tarr and Porter 132). Political fallout from the investigation was compounded when Celebreeze responded by eliminating the Ohio Bar’s involvement in the day-to-day operations of the Ohio Supreme Court, by packing the court with administrators who were loyal to his leadership, and by fighting openly with other justices on the court (Tarr and Porter 135).

Levels of publicity about court contests and campaign activity reached record levels in 1986, when Chief Justice Celebreeze was challenged by Republican Thomas Moyer. Spending was astronomical for a court race—Celebreeze and Moyer spent a total of $2.8 million dollars on their campaigns—and interest groups and the media focused heavily on Celebreeze’s behavior as chief justice and advocated “cleaning up” the court. Celebreeze’s subsequent defeat and the return to a Republican majority on the court were due in large measure to the high salience of the 1986 campaign. More importantly, the media attention surrounding Celebreeze and the 1986 campaign made many Ohioans aware of the court as a political institution and as a policymaker.
Moyer’s election as chief justice marked a return to court elections that largely were limited in their visibility and much less contentious. Both parties have continued to field candidates for seats on the court, and candidates occasionally have raised and spent large amounts of money on their campaigns for the court. However, the tenor of campaigns for the court has changed for the most part from being heated and intensely personality-driven, to being based on civility and issues. Because of this shift in the tenor of judicial campaigns, the public (and to a lesser extent, the media) has seen little of interest in the campaigns and thus candidates have had difficulty getting voters to understand and react to meaningful information in their campaigns.

For example, in 1998 Democratic challenger Gary Tyack ran a well-funded and highly visible campaign against chief justice Thomas Moyer. Despite being well-funded and very visible, he was unable to command much popular support in the general election, receiving only 28 percent of the popular vote. The only exception to this pattern occurred during the 2000 election, when veteran Democratic justice Alice Robie Resnick was faced with an extremely well-financed and high profile campaign by business groups (in response to her decision opposing tort reform) to oust her from her seat and replace her with a more conservative justice who presumably would be more “friendly” to business interests. Despite the heated and high-profile nature of this campaign, she won re-election by virtually the same margin that she received during her 1994 campaign.

The Ohio Supreme Court hears a mixture of original cases and mandatory and discretionary appeals. Each year, however, the court tends to be very selective about the discretionary cases it gives full consideration, meaning that only a fairly small percentage of the decisions it makes on the merits involves these discretionary cases. The policy
outputs and decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court also reflect the varying role of the court in the political process. This variation has occurred along two dimensions—the ideological nature of decisions and the salience of decisions to state policymakers and the public. Tarr and Porter (1988) note that until 1978 the Ohio Supreme Court was dominated by what they termed “conservative, old-stock Republicans” and that as a result, the decisions of the court tended to reflect the values of rural Ohioans (127). Moreover, the court tended to favor decisions that promoted stability in the state political system, continued existing state policies, and above all, avoided conflict with the governor and state legislature.

As noted above, with the election of chief justice Frank Celebreeze, the court began to take a more liberal stance on many economic issues and Celebreeze proudly proclaimed the court a “peoples’ court” that focused on the “little guy or gal” (Tarr and Porter 128). The newly Democratic court acted quickly to overturn established precedent restricting suits against state and local governments, constraining rights of tenants, and limiting damages in medical malpractice cases. As Tarr and Porter point out, the court quickly transformed itself into a political institution that favored the political agenda of organized labor and focused on the values of urban Ohioans (129).

This shift in focus made the decisions of the “new” court immediately controversial, brought the court into open conflict with the governor and legislature, and made the court the target of a wide array of criticism from Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature. In many cases, Republicans and Democrats worked together either to overturn these more liberal court decisions or to pass new legislation that made liberal interpretations all but impossible (Tarr and Porter 131). Of course, during this time the
court also gained new and vocal support from parties and organizations that benefited from the more liberal decisions—especially labor unions, academic lawyers, and plaintiff’s associations (Tarr and Porter 131). This new support added substantial complexity to the court’s political environment.

The Ohio Supreme Court historically has had dissent rates that are among the highest in the nation, and personal and professional intra-court relations during Celebreeze’s tenure also were anything but collegial. For example, in 1984 the newly elected Republican justices Douglas and Wright both won their seats with campaigns that focused more on criticizing Celebreeze than on issues; Douglas and Wright continued their criticism of him once they were sworn-in. Celebreeze responded by attacking them personally and by accusing them of showing favoritism toward an attorney by voting to terminate a disciplinary suspension against the attorney (Tarr and Porter 135). Later, Douglas and Wright publicly accused Celebreeze of having their office telephones tapped (Tarr and Porter 136). The justices (especially Celebreeze) also tended to personalize policy disagreements by attacking each other in judicial opinions (Tarr and Porter 146). These interpersonal disagreements attracted a significant amount of attention from the media and the public, but at the same time diverted attention in many cases from what was really important about the court—its ruling and policy decisions.

The mid to late 1990s can be characterized in large measure as a fairly quiet time for the court. Many decisions were not controversial, and as noted previously, many of the electoral contests for the court were not heated and failed to capture the sustained attention of the public and media. In large measure, the court during the past few years has played a less-visible--but still critically important--role as a policymaker in Ohio,
with many of its decisions attracting virtually no attention from the public or the media. Of course some of the court’s decisions during this latter period have proved to be very controversial and as a result have attracted a large amount of attention from media outlets and other state officeholders. Among these more visible and controversial decisions was the 1997 decision of the court in DeRolph v. Ohio striking down the state’s funding arrangement for public schools (described in more detail above), a 2000 decision of the court (DeRolph v. Ohio, 2000) finding that the state legislature’s revised school funding scheme remained unconstitutional, and a 1999 decision striking down “tort reform” legislation passed by the Ohio legislature in 1996 that limited monetary awards in personal injury lawsuits and that favored defendants by increasing plaintiffs’ burden of proof. Thus, although the period from the mid-1990s to the present has been quieter and less controversial for the court than the period when Celebreeze was Chief Justice, the court continues to adjudicate controversial and difficult issues of state policy, and many of its decisions continue the liberal trend of previous periods.

This cursory review of the history of the Ohio Supreme Court demonstrates that while the court is a central part of the political system in the state of Ohio, its precise role in Ohio politics has varied greatly over the past twenty years. In part, this variation has been due to (and has been reflected in) changes in partisan control of the court, electoral contests that periodically attract a large amount of attention from the public and media, and a fairly small number of high-profile decisions by the court which have served to set the agenda of policymakers in the legislative and executive branches and which have brought the court into occasional conflict with one or both of the other branches of Ohio government.
Political Institutions and Public Legitimacy

Political scientists have studied the role of political institutions in the political process since the beginning of the discipline and one topic in this area of research that has received extensive attention is that of public support for political institutions. Research in this area has identified two forms of public support for political institutions that have been applied widely to research on support for courts and other political institutions. The first is diffuse support, which can be conceptualized as general satisfaction with a court or other political institution as an institution. Specific support, the second type of support, usually is thought of as support for the policy outputs of the court or political institution.

Easton’s 1965 book, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, focused on these two types of support and argued strongly that for political institutions to be effective and stable, they and their leaders need to be perceived as legitimate by the public. Legitimacy, according to Easton, is an important concept in both political and practical senses. Those in power presumably have static or progressive ambitions and thus seek legitimacy to help them get either re-elected to the same office or elected to a more prestigious higher office. However, officeholders by and large are unable to control whether they or their office is perceived as legitimate; instead, citizens make the determination of whether a political actor or a political institution is legitimate. Thus, the search for legitimacy by political actors and institutions can be conceptualized as an iterated and loosely structured game that entails a give and take between citizens and the leaders of political institutions. Legitimate organizations and actors are those that have successfully balanced the needs and desires of citizens with the outputs that an actor or
governmental unit is producing or capable of producing. As Easton and other political scientists have noted, legitimacy also requires that political leaders have some ability to achieve compliance by the public with the mandates and outputs of government (Easton 1965, Murphy and Tanenhaus, 1968).

Although the public does not always regard political offices, institutions, and leaders as legitimate, Easton notes that the characteristics of democratic political systems facilitate the establishment of legitimacy. These characteristics include selection of political officials by popular vote and social norms that encourage adherence to democratic principles by leaders in their decision-making processes. Easton argues that the perception that decisions—even decisions that are contrary to the will of the people—have been arrived at by democratic principles makes it more likely that the public will regard those decisions as legitimate and thus, that they will comply with them. Easton considers the distinction between support for decisions and support for political offices and institutions critically important and uses it to develop the two separate concepts of support noted above.
Easton called support for political offices and institutions and their decision-making processes diffuse support. He defines diffuse support as, “a broad and abstract set of attitudes that provides a ‘reservoir’ of generalized positive feelings” (272). In his view, this type of support typically is established by socialization processes and is not based on individual self-interest, but instead on fundamental acceptance of the political system. Easton viewed diffuse support as the most critical form of support since it provides a reservoir of support that contributes to ensuring stability in the political system and which helps individual political institutions weather fallout from unpopular outputs or decisions.

However, support for the policies and outputs of a political institution—what Easton called specific support—was rooted in individual self-interest and could be conceptualized as the extent to which the public agreed or disagreed with particular decisions or policies implemented by political officials (273). He argued that although specific support was linked to the legitimacy of a political organization, low specific support for a policy or decision usually would not translate immediately into lower legitimacy (or diffuse support) for that organization. After all, governments and political institutions struggle continually to arrive at decisions that command widespread public support, and in many cases governments and political institutions find themselves in positions where they are compelled by situational mandates to make decisions that are unpopular with significant portions of the citizenry. Easton argued that diffuse support could mitigate the deleterious effects of unpopular decisions or unsatisfactory policy outputs. Essentially, this sort of situation would be one where even though many citizens disagreed with a specific decision made by a political institution, they still respected the
institution’s decision-making processes and supported the institution as a political
institution. As noted above, Easton argued that the two forms of support were
theoretically distinct and considered diffuse support to be most critical for the legitimacy
of political institutions and the stability of the political system as a whole.¹

Political scientists and students of the judiciary have been concerned about the
public’s support of courts and their outputs because courts play an important role as
policy makers and as checks on other institutions in our democratic system. At the same
time that courts are central to the political process, they also often are composed of
unelected officials and rarely have formal powers or sufficient resources to ensure that
members of the public and other political actors comply with their decisions. Virtually
all courts also must rely on other political actors to implement their decisions. Thus,
public support of courts becomes critically important, as it is this support that helps
insure that judicial decisions are implemented effectively. Without high levels of diffuse
and specific support, the legitimacy of courts as political institutions may be threatened,
and this in turn likely can influence courts’ ability to make policy and to serve as
effective checks and balances on other branches of government. One can even argue that
the question of public support is even more critical for lower courts than for higher courts
(such as the U.S. Supreme Court), as many lower court judges/justices are subject to
some sort of periodic popular election and thus for institutional, policy-making, and
personal reasons must ensure that they maintain high levels of institutional and personal
approval.

¹ Even though Easton posited that diffuse and specific support were theoretically distinct, more recent
research (especially Segal 1995) has found evidence that these two types of support are more closely
related for courts than in Easton’s original formulation.
Research Design

My research design has two primary components. The first component is a descriptive and explanatory analysis that will allow me to chart the patterns of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Because so few previous data were available that included conceptually-precise measures of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I engaged in a primary data collection effort in order to mitigate the significant limitations that analyzing secondary data would require. I was able to include a total of seven conceptually-precise measures of diffuse and specific support (along with a larger number of related measures) as part of the July/August 2001 Buckeye State Poll, a monthly survey of Ohio residents conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Ohio State University. I also was able to include a smaller subset of these measures of support on the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a rigorous examination of the contours of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and to provide an empirical foundation for the second part of my research design—the experiment. Although this may seem to be a fairly basic objective, I remain unaware of any recent published or unpublished analyses that describe and explain the levels of public support provided to the Ohio Supreme Court by Ohio residents.

The core portion of the research effort reported here is a unique experiment (described in more detail in chapter 5) designed to test whether the messages and discourse of political elites can influence levels of specific and diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. To address this research question I created a unique survey-based experiment that manipulated how the Court’s action in the recent and ongoing school
funding debate was framed. This experiment and the support measures that follow them allowed me to test whether elite messages about the school funding decisions or about the Court as an institution can influence Ohioans’ diffuse and specific support for the Court. I also used the data from this experiment to test the demographic and attitudinal factors that account for various patterns of support held by respondents in my sample.

**Forthcoming Chapters**

This chapter has served as a general introduction to my dissertation. The following chapters elaborate upon the discussion begun here and also report the results of the analyses I have conducted. Chapter 2 synthesizes a wide variety of literature in the public opinion and judicial subfields of political science to create a thorough picture of the current state of scholarly knowledge on support for courts.

Chapter 3 begins with an in-depth review of Zaller’s (1992) work on the nature of opinion formation and change and discusses many important theoretical issues related to support for courts. This chapter employs Zaller’s model as a theoretical framework that I use as a guide for the analyses that follow in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 describes the research design of my dissertation more fully and uses new data to describe and explain Ohioans’ diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In doing so, it sets the stage for the experimental analysis in chapter 5 that in many ways lies at the heart of my dissertation.
Chapter 5 focuses on my survey-based experiment and includes a detailed discussion of its design, along with the framing statements used as part of the experiment. It also presents the findings from the survey-based experiment and discusses their importance to the Ohio Supreme Court as an institution and in reference to Easton’s two concepts of support.

Chapter 6 uses the data from my survey-based experiment to look at the relationship between the three measures of support included in my dataset. I build on this by describing patterns of support across my three measures and by using multivariate analyses to create a demographic and attitudinal profile of respondents who held each pattern of support.

Chapter 7 serves as a capstone chapter that brings together the findings of my investigation and highlights several yet unanswered research questions that can be addressed in the future.
CHAPTER 2

THE EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION

Theory and Research on Support for Courts

As noted in chapter 1, public attitudes toward courts long have been a focus of scholarly research efforts in political science. Since the 1960s, scholars have looked at public support for a wide variety of courts. Although much of this research has focused on charting levels of diffuse and specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court, more recent scholarship has studied support for a variety of other legal institutions and also has begun to explore the correlates of support for a variety of sub-populations within the general public. To a lesser extent, scholars also have attempted to explain the theoretical bases of support for courts. These efforts have provided a basic understanding of the contours of diffuse and specific support for a variety of courts but have been less successful in developing a workable and universally-accepted theoretical framework to guide scholars in interpreting observed patterns of both diffuse and specific support.

Although the primary purpose of my dissertation is to report new data collected about the Ohio Supreme Court and to look at support for the court in light of its controversial decisions striking down Ohio’s funding system for public education, putting my research in context requires a general understanding of existing scholarly literature on support for courts. This chapter provides a fairly concise but comprehensive review of the existing literature on support for courts in order to frame the research in subsequent chapters.
Because the literature on support for courts addresses the various facets of this research question in widely differing ways, the chapter organizes the literature along four dimensions: substantive coverage, use of theory, methods of analysis, and findings. It also includes figures at the end of the chapter (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) that summarize the literature in this area along a variety of relevant dimensions. Although one advantage to this organizational approach is that it provides readers with a concise modularized review of the literature along the most critically important dimensions, it does so at the cost of occasional redundancy. That is, different aspects of the same scholarly work are likely to be reviewed in each section. However, this organizational approach helps to synthesize the widely varying findings, methods, and units of analysis used by scholars.

**Substantive coverage**

Most of the work on support for courts has focused on support for the U.S. Supreme Court, and scholars only recently have begun to study support for state and local courts. This section of the chapter reviews the substantive coverage of the existing literature, and pays specific attention to the court being studied, the type of support being analyzed, and whether the analysis was cross-sectional or longitudinal in nature.

Kessel’s (1966) analysis of Seattle residents’ public support for the U.S. Supreme Court remains one of the seminal works on this research question. Kessel analyzed support in a cross-sectional sense and measured residents’ general feelings about the U.S. Supreme Court as an institution, their opinions about what the role of the court should be, and their evaluations of the Supreme Court’s performance in a variety of policy areas.
Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968) used data from the 1966 National Election Study to look at a wider cross-section of support for the U.S. Supreme Court. In contrast to Kessel’s groundbreaking analysis, Murphy and Tanenhaus drew explicitly on Easton’s theoretical framework (1965) and focused on measuring diffuse support, or support for the Court as an institution, and specific support, or support for specific decisions made by the Court. Their initial analysis was cross-sectional in nature, but later work (Murphy and Tanenhaus, 1975) reported data from re-interviews with the original respondents in the 1968 study and in doing so, allowed the authors to analyze both types of support for the Court in a longitudinal manner.

Handberg and Maddox (1982) used national cross-sectional data collected in 1972, 1974, and 1976 to analyze aggregate levels of diffuse and specific support for the Court. Caldeira (1986) noted that most of the work on support for the Court had taken a cross-sectional approach and argued that this type of research design was incomplete. He used national data collected from 1966 to 1984 to create a rigorous time-series of support for the Court. Because he had to assemble his data from multiple sources and was very constrained in the measures of support that were available on the various datasets employed in the analysis, he was able only to measure general public confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court as an institution—not Easton’s concepts of diffuse and specific support.

Caldeira and Gibson (1992) and Gibson and Caldeira (1992) used data collected as part of the 1987 General Social Survey to analyze diffuse and specific support for the Court. As in many of the previous works, Caldeira and Gibson differentiated between diffuse and specific support; unlike previous studies, however, they designed new
measures of diffuse and specific support that they argued had more construct validity than those employed in previous studies. Segal (1995) used data collected in 1972, 1974, and 1994 as part of the National Election Study to measure diffuse and specific support for the Court in both a cross-sectional and longitudinal manner. Mondak and Smithey (1997) used longitudinal data collected as part of the General Social Survey to describe and explain changes in aggregate public confidence in the justices of the Court between 1972 and 1994. More recently, Hoekstra (2000) used a series of two-wave panel surveys to study support for the U.S. Supreme Court in local communities. Finally, work by Gibson and Caldeira (2003a, 2003b) used data collected from a national survey they fielded in 2001 to investigate measurement issues related to support for the U.S. Supreme Court and to provide an updated description and explanation of levels of support for the Court.

In part, the focus on the U.S. Supreme Court as the substantive unit of analysis in scholars’ work has stemmed from data considerations, in that most of the best data collected to date on the question of support for courts has focused on the U.S. Supreme Court. Also, choosing to focus on the U.S. Supreme Court in some respects has simplified the analytical task facing scholars who are interested in this research question. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court is a single court of last resort that is unique in its position in the American framework of government. Additionally, most of the theoretical and conceptual work done in this area of research has been focused on the Court. As a result, looking at the question of support for other courts—especially appeals courts and state/local courts—often requires scholars to develop new data sources and can require new measures and/or concepts of support. Moreover, analyzing support in local, state, or
federal court systems where there are multiple courts (such as the case with the federal courts of appeals) also requires scholars to account for philosophical, practical, and jurisdictional differences between the individual courts in the system in question. Not surprisingly, these challenges have made studying support for state and local courts much more difficult.

Despite these challenges, scholars long have recognized the importance of understanding support for courts besides the U.S. Supreme Court and have begun to focus on studying public support for courts at the state and local levels. Lehne and Reynolds (1978) were among the first to look systematically at support for a state-level court. They analyzed the job performance of the New Jersey state Supreme Court using data collected at four points during 1975 and 1976 and took an explicitly longitudinal approach in their analysis. In contrast to virtually all of the other analyses of support for courts, Lehne and Reynolds studied the job approval of the New Jersey state Supreme Court immediately before and after it made a series of decisions that struck down the state’s funding system for public education—thus creating controversy that placed the court squarely in the middle of a heated political debate and which allowed the authors to study support for the court in a period that was anything but “business as usual.”

Flanagan, et. al (1982) used national data collected from a variety of sources between 1965 and 1982 to study citizens’ perceptions of state and local criminal courts with both cross-sectional and longitudinal techniques of analysis. They measured perceptions with a variety of questions that included perceptions of judges’ sympathy toward criminals, perceptions of court decisions and outcomes and perceptions of judges sentencing decisions.
More recently, Voelker and Kritzer (1996) studied citizens’ perceptions of state-level courts in Wisconsin using cross-sectional data collected from state residents who had had involvement with any state level court. They conceptualized support broadly and included an extensive array of measures of residents’ perceptions of Wisconsin’s courts, including their perceptions of the fairness of the proceedings, affordability, user-friendliness, and effectiveness of court proceedings and decisions. Later work by Kritzer and Voelker (1998) re-addressed this research question and compared the results from Wisconsin to those obtained in seventeen other states. As before, they adopted a cross-sectional approach in their research, and to maximize the comparability of their results across states, used the same 35 measures of citizens’ perceptions that they used in their 1996 study of Wisconsin.

More recent work by Olson and Huth (1998) relied on a 1991 survey of Utah residents to study support for Utah state courts. Olson and Huth took a cross-sectional approach in their research and argued that scholars’ long-established practice of differentiating between diffuse and specific support was less useful for studying support for state and local courts than it was for the U.S. Supreme Court due to differences in the structure, mission and caseload of state and local courts. As a result, they focused their analysis on residents’ approval of the job performance of Utah’s state-level courts. Finally, Wenzel, et al (2003) used data from a national survey they fielded to analyze confidence in state and local courts.

This review of the substantive coverage of existing work demonstrates that although scholars have studied public support for a wide variety of national, state, and local courts, the question of support for the U.S. Supreme Court has received the vast
majority of scholarly attention. Moreover, scholars have used a variety of cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches to study support and have focused on many different types of support—among them, confidence in courts, support for courts as institutions (diffuse support), and support for the decisions and policy outputs of courts. The review will now shift to issues of theory and its use in the literature on this research question.

Theory

Caldeira’s (1991) synthesis of the literature on support for the U.S. Supreme Court noted that the existing literature on public support for courts generally has given little attention to issues of theory. He argued that, “…we have no theory of support for the Supreme Court. Studies of public opinion abound with competing theories and explanations, but scholars of the courts have not often drawn on them” (324). Although scholars generally have paid less attention to issues of theory than to the substance and methodology of their work, a careful reading of the literature demonstrates that scholars have used a wide variety of theoretical frameworks in their work on support for courts.
One of the earliest and most widely used theoretical frameworks was developed by Easton (1965) to provide a theoretical explanation for the enduring legitimacy of American political institutions. As explained more fully in chapter 1 (above), Easton argued that stability in a political system usually required that citizens believe that their political officials and institutions were legitimate. Easton argued that personal and institutional legitimacy was derived (1) from popular selection of officials by the people and (2) from the adherence to principles of democracy by leaders as they made decisions. Popular perceptions that political institutions were legitimate meant that citizens would be more likely to support the regime and thus, to comply with its policy outputs.

Easton saw two primary mechanisms by which the mass citizenry could support a legitimate democratic government. First, citizens could support the institutions of government themselves, along with the decision processes of the institution(s) in question. Easton called this generalized institutional support “diffuse” support and conceptualized it as, “a broad and abstract set of attitudes that provides a ‘reservoir’ of generalized positive feelings” (272). Separate from this was popular support for the decisions or policy outputs themselves. Public support for policies and outputs of government—called specific support by Easton—was rooted in self-interest and at times was targeted narrowly to specific outputs of the institution, not toward the system or institution as a whole. Easton argued that diffuse support provided a “reservoir” of popular goodwill that helped political institutions weather fallout from unpopular outputs or decisions, and as a result, he viewed it as the most critical form of support needed to ensure stability within a political regime.
Easton’s theoretical framework has been the dominant one used either implicitly or explicitly by scholars in their analyses of support. Virtually all of the major work analyzing support for the U.S. Supreme Court—including Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968, 1975), Handberg and Maddox (1982), Caldeira and Gibson (1992), Gibson and Caldeira (1992), Segal (1995), and Gibson, Caldeira and Spence (2003a, 2003b) have relied on Easton’s framework. However, Easton’s theoretical framework has been applied much less often to the study of support for state and local courts. This has been due to severe data limitations, to a focus by scholars interested in these courts on explanation and description of levels of support for these courts—not on issues of theory—and to theoretical arguments about the relevance of Easton’s framework to state and lower courts. Strikingly, although many scholars have used Easton’s framework as the theoretical grounding for their work on support for courts, scholars have not tested the explanatory power of Easton’s framework. Instead, scholars have appeared to accept Easton’s framework as useful and have used it to structure their research on support for courts and to give theoretical meaning to their data, measures, and results.

More recently, however, other scholars have begun to develop new theoretical perspectives in their work on support for courts. One of the alternative frameworks scholars have turned to for theoretical guidance is political socialization. Scholars who have adopted socialization as a theoretical framework for support argue that as citizens grow up, they are taught by parents, political and social institutions, and friends to be supportive of courts and other fundamental political institutions—even if they disagree with the specific decisions and policy outputs of the institution.

Jaros and Roper’s 1980 analysis of support for the U.S. Supreme Court is the most notable example of work that uses this theoretical explanation. Jaros and Roper sought to explain a seeming paradox—why citizens support the U.S. Supreme Court and consider it to be a legitimate political institution despite the fact that the Court often makes substantive decisions that significant portions of the public disagree with. They designed their analysis as an empirical test of three competing theoretical explanations for this seeming paradox—the power of judicial myth, diffuse/affective orientations toward the Court as an institution, and support and/or approval of specific decisions made by the Court.

As part of this research, the authors created a survey instrument with extensive batteries of items designed to test each of the three explanations and administered the instrument to approximately 300 students at Western Kentucky University (a higher status, predominately white university) and approximately 300 students at Kentucky State University (a lower status, predominately black university). Surprisingly, the data provided no support for any of the three hypothesized explanations for the legitimacy of the Court. However, the data did show that the most socio-economically disadvantaged respondents in the survey (especially blacks) were most likely to consider the Court to be legitimate.

From this, Jaros and Roper argued that theories of pre-adult socialization explain why citizens support the U.S. Supreme Court and why the Court is considered legitimate. In their view, citizens—especially citizens in disadvantaged social groups—seemed to have internalized obedience to the Court on a purely subconscious level (103). That is, even if these respondents expressed disapproval of specific acts of the Court, Jaros and
Roper argued that socialization led them to voice support for the Court as an institution, to comply with the Court’s decisions, and to consider the Court a legitimate political institution.

Other scholars have used theories from contemporary social psychology to explain support for courts. Mondak and Smithey’s 1997 analysis serves as a good example of work that has drawn on this type of theoretical framework. Mondak and Smithey argued that existing theoretical explanations of support for the Court—especially Easton’s framework—all failed to explain why aggregate support for the Court has tended to be high and stable over time. Like Jaros and Roper, they noted that any plausible theoretical explanation of support for the Court has to explain a seeming paradox—the question of why support tends to remain high and stable in the face of frequently controversial and polarizing decisions by the Court.

The authors used data from multiple years of the Harris Poll and the General Social Survey to create a “panel” of respondents that they used to test a dynamic model of aggregate support for the Court. Mondak and Smithey argued that their data demonstrated that the aggregate stability observed by scholars masked a significant amount of individual-level change and used this argument to create a picture of offsetting gains and losses at the individual level. That is, even though aggregate support for the Court seemed mostly stable over time, individual citizens’ judgments of how much support to provide to the Court were fluid and seen by the authors as a function of memory-based cognitive processing.
The authors explained these findings by arguing that individuals’ judgments of support for the Court are inherently rooted in memory, and as new information about the Court and new decisions are received and processed, the new information (coupled with fallible individual recall capacities) gradually drives out old information and orientations about the Court.

Mondak and Smithey also created a feedback loop in their model that allowed support to be regenerated at the individual level. This loop was based on the notions 1) that basic democratic values and socialization strongly encourage support for core political institutions such as the Court, and 2) that even though the Court often makes controversial or unpopular decisions, it also is very likely to make decisions individuals will regard favorably those positive decisions will win back support lost from unpopular decisions in the past.

Thus, unlike much of the past work, Mondak and Smithey created an individual-level theoretical model of support rooted in individual citizens’ cognitive processing capabilities. Their framework presumes that individuals’ support of the Court will cycle based on the policy outputs of the Court, and on individuals’ overall affect towards the mixture of the Court’s decisions that they are able to recall.
Finally, other scholars have used perception-based theoretical frameworks to explain citizens’ support for courts and other political institutions. Scholars using these sorts of theoretical frameworks have argued that citizens’ perceptions of the fairness of institutional proceedings influence whether they consider the institution and its policy outputs to be legitimate. Presumably, if citizens consider institutions and the policy outputs of the institutions to be legitimate, they in turn will express support for both the institutions and the policy outputs.

Work by Tyler (1988) relied on this type of perception-based theoretical framework. He tested the framework with data from interviews with 652 citizens who had recent contact with the police, courts, or other authority figures. He sought to determine whether citizens’ perceptions of procedural justice and of the fairness of court proceedings influenced their satisfaction with legal authorities and the decision outcomes made by them. Using regression and factor analysis, Tyler found that perceptions of procedural justice were important correlates of both the level of outcome satisfaction and of the support given to the legal institution. Moreover, he found that perceptions of procedural justice and fairness were dependent on seven related factors: 1) the degree to which citizens perceived that authorities were motivated to be fair; 2) citizens’ judgments of the honesty of political and legal figures; 3) the degree to which authority figures seemed to behave ethically; 4) the extent to which opportunities for citizens to have a voice in the proceedings were provided; 5) perceptions of the quality of the decisions made; 6) the ability by citizens to appeal and correct perceived errors; and 7) finally, judgments about whether the authorities behaved in a biased fashion.
Thus, Tyler found that popular support for and the legitimacy of legal authorities was based on citizens’ evaluations of the decision outputs of the legal institutions and on their judgments of how fairly the court’s decision was made. However, work by Gibson (1989) came to a very different conclusion. He re-tested whether perceptions of procedural justice and fairness led citizens to view courts as legitimate and found that perceptions of procedural fairness had little relationship to legitimacy of the court or to compliance with the decision by citizens—a diametrically opposite result that has yet to be resolved in the literature.

As plausible and promising as all of these arguments are, each addresses only some of the many theoretical issues that surround support for courts. Chapter 3 (below) revisits this issue and uses work by Zaller (1992) as the basis for a new and more comprehensive theoretical explanation of support for courts.

Methodology

Just as scholars have used an extensive variety of theoretical frameworks in their work, they also have used a variety of methodological approaches to study support for courts. This section of the chapter will review the methodological approaches employed by scholars in their work along two relevant dimensions—mode of data collection, and issues of operationalization and conceptualization of support for courts.

The most logical place to begin is with the mode of data collection. As even a cursory reading of the literature will reveal, this is one of the few areas where there is relatively little variance in the approach used by scholars—most of the best-known and most-cited work has been based on survey data. Included in this body of scholarly work
are analyses from Kessel (1966), Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968, 1975), Handberg and Maddox (1982), Caldeira (1986), Caldeira and Gibson (1992), Gibson and Caldeira (1992), Hoekstra (2000), and Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence (2003a, 2003b), among many others. This analytic choice makes sense in many respects, since much of the work in this tradition has focused at least in part on describing and explaining levels of support for the court being studied. One of the greatest strengths of survey data—especially that which uses a representative/random sample of the target population—is that it allows analysts to generalize the findings from their sample to some larger population. Thus, scholars’ use of survey data in their work has helped them to describe and explain support for courts for a wide variety of national, state, and local populations. In doing so, scholars have been able to reach many of the descriptive and analytical goals of their research. Data from laboratory experiments, by virtue of its limited generalizeability, in all likelihood would have been much less suited to the type of analyses conducted to date by many scholars.

However, the almost exclusive use of survey data by scholars in this area is not without costs. At the same time that survey data permits scholars to generalize their findings to a variety of populations, this focus limits the range of research questions that scholars can study in their work. After all, survey data typically is not well suited to answering questions about the social, cognitive, and psychological mechanisms that structure the levels of support voiced by citizens. Simply, the controlled environment afforded by a well-designed experiment provides a better opportunity to determine the underlying causal relationships between variables and allows much more control than surveys over potentially confounding variables.
Of course, this is not to say that scholars have not used experimental methods to study public support for courts. Several investigators have used experimental data to help investigate questions related to public opinion and support for courts. Tyler and Mitchell (1994) used experimental data to study whether public legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court was related to compliance with abortion decisions made by the Court. Mondak (1991) used experimental data to try to understand whether public approval of the U.S. Supreme Court resulted from substantive or procedural aspects of the Court’s decisions. Segal (1995) used a combination of survey and experimental data to investigate the relationship between diffuse and specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court. More recently, Gibson, Caldeira,and Spence (2003a, 2003b) used survey-based experiments in their work to capture many of the advantages of both data collection strategies.

While all of these studies are related in a general sense to the question of public support for courts, they focus on only a small subset of the possible questions in this area that can be studied with experimental data. Subsequent chapters in my dissertation will use both survey data and data from a survey-based experiment to describe and explain levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court and to test whether elite messages function as one source of support for the court.

Given that scholars have focused on a variety of substantive domains in their research, employed a similar variety of theoretical frameworks, and have used both surveys and laboratory experiments as their modes of data collection, it should come as no surprise that scholars also have used widely differing conceptualizations and operationalizations of support in their work. As noted above, many analyses—starting with Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968)—have adopted Easton’s notions of diffuse and
specific support as their conceptualization of support. Other work at the national level, such as that by Caldeira (1986) and Mondak and Smithey (1997), has conceptualized support as public confidence in the Court. Notably, some scholars studying support for state and local courts have argued that Easton’s conceptualizations of diffuse and specific support are not well differentiated (and thus, usable) for state and local courts due to the differing subject matter and caseloads handled by these courts. Severe data limitations and the face validity of this argument have motivated many scholars studying support for state and local courts to conceptualize support for these courts as citizens’ perceptions of the state and local courts (Flanagan, et. al., 1982; Voelker and Kritzer 1996, 1998) or as their approval of the job performance of these courts (Olson and Huth, 1998).

Wide differences in the conceptualizations of support used by scholars have translated into an equally wide variety of operationalizations in the literature. Segal’s (1995) synthesis of the existing literature on this topic highlighted at least five distinct operationalizations of public support for the U.S. Supreme Court alone. At the national level, some scholars—such as Kessel (1966), Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968, 1975), Handberg and Maddox (1982), Caldeira (1986), and Segal (1995)—have operationalized support for the U.S. Supreme Court using specific survey questions in already existing datasets.

Work by Caldeira and Gibson (1992) argued strongly that this approach often resulted in diffuse and specific support being confounded. To ameliorate this, Caldeira and Gibson designed new operationalizations of diffuse and specific support that they argued more clearly differentiated the two concepts. They operationalized diffuse support with a series of five-point Likert scales that measured respondent’s orientations
toward the U.S. Supreme Court as an institution, and operationalized specific support with a single new question that asked respondents for their evaluation of the decision outputs of the Court. Not surprisingly, the small body of work focused on state and local courts reflects a similar variety of operationalizations of support. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 at the end of the chapter provide further details on many of the operational definitions adopted by scholars.

These differences in operationalization for the most part have not reflected voluntary analytical choices by researchers. Data and resource limitations often have forced scholars to rely on secondary survey data that was not designed explicitly to test perceptions of courts, thus requiring scholars to operationalize specific and diffuse support with available survey questions that are relevant to their research interests. In many cases, this has resulted in operational definitions that are much less rigorous than scholars ideally would like. Moreover, the courts traditionally have not been a major focus of polling and survey research. Questions about courts and support for courts often are few and far between, and researchers often have been left with the unfortunate necessity of making the most of very imperfect data. Of course, the lack of theory in the research area exacerbates these data problems, since even with copious data, there likely would be little agreement among scholars about how to define or measure support.

Recent work by Gibson, Caldeira and Spence (2003b) looks at this question directly by investigating two different conceptualizations of support for the U.S. Supreme Court—confidence in the Court, and institutional loyalty (or diffuse support)—because the two conceptualizations often are used interchangeably in both scholarship and the popular media. Their goal was to determine whether the two measures of support were in
fact measuring the same concept of support. They hypothesized that the concept of confidence in the Court confounded citizens’ support for the Court as an institution and their support for the policy outputs and decisions of the Court.

Using data from a national survey conducted in 2001, they found that although institutional loyalty (diffuse support) was related to confidence in the Court, the variables displayed only moderate associations (361). More importantly, they found that the concept of confidence in the Court captured both diffuse and specific support, with specific support factors dominating the variance of the measure (363). Consistent with their previous research, Gibson, Caldeira and Spence argue that scholars need to differentiate between diffuse and specific support and that confidence in the Court should be used as a measure of institutional loyalty (diffuse support) only if no other, more rigorous, measures of support are available. Aside from the substantive findings, Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence’s work shows, quite simply, that issues of conceptualization and operationalization of support for courts matter, and that the measure of support used in an analysis can have a significant influence on the results.

Findings I: Levels of Support

The chapter to this point has focused on detailing the substantive coverage of existing work, on reviewing the literature’s use of theory, and on describing a few of the analytic choices made by scholars in their work. The next section of the chapter will review the findings and results of existing work and will describe how those findings explain: 1) levels of support expressed by citizens for courts and the stability of that support over time; and 2) the demographic, attitudinal, and policy-related correlates of
support for both the U.S. Supreme Court and state and local courts. A final section of this chapter uses the results presented below to highlight differences in levels and correlates of support for the U.S. Supreme Court and state and local courts.

Many works analyzing the question of public support for the U.S. Supreme Court have reported findings that help explain aggregate levels of support for the Court. Using both open-ended and categorical measures of support, Kessel (1966) found that a majority of respondents in his sample of Seattle residents had positive views about the Court, regardless of the measure in question (171). Moreover, he found that there were almost as many respondents who were neutral toward the Court as there were who took any sort of negative position. Additionally, Kessel argued that a significant portion of his sample knew so little about the U.S. Supreme Court that their data had to be dropped from his analyses.

Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968) used data from two items included on the 1966 National Election Study (NES) to study both diffuse and specific support for the Court across the nation. Their results created a very different and much less positive picture of support for the Court. Although 53 percent of their sample knew too little about the Court to answer either question, Murphy and Tanenhaus found that 37 percent of their respondents expressed a positive evaluation of the general role of the Court, while slightly less than 22 percent thought the general role of the Court was negative (374).
Looking at specific support, they found that only 11 percent of their respondents held a positive view of specific decisions and outputs of the Court, while 31 percent held critical beliefs about the specific outputs of the Court. Thus, while respondents were supportive of the Court as a political institution, they were much less supportive of its policies and decisions.

Murphy and Tanenhaus (1981) tested the stability of these results using data from a 1975 NES panel study that included many of the respondents from the original 1966 study. Using the same measures as in the 1966 analysis, they found that diffuse support for the Court decreased significantly between 1966 and 1975 but still remained slightly favorable toward the Court (38). In contrast, they found that while the level of specific support for the Court had increased slightly, a majority of their respondents still did not express support for the decisions and outputs of the Court (38).

Caldeira (1986) looked at the question of support for the U.S. Supreme Court in a longitudinal sense, using data on confidence in the Court from NORC and Harris Associates from 1966 to 1984. Although the primary focus of his analysis was on the question of stability of support over time, it is worth noting that only once—in 1967—did confidence in the Court reach 50 percent (1213). For the entire period, Caldeira reported that on average, only 32 percent of the population reported having significant confidence in the Court—a negative finding that is in keeping with the results of Murphy and Tanenhaus’ earlier work. More importantly, however, Caldeira found that levels of support for the Court were anything but static—between 1966 and 1984, confidence in the Court varied by as much as twenty-five percentage points (1213).
Caldeira and Gibson’s (1992) analysis of a new series of new items included on the 1987 General Social Survey (GSS) found statistically significant differences between white respondents in their sample and black respondents on each measure of both diffuse and specific support (640). For their sample of whites, Caldeira and Gibson found generally high levels of diffuse support. Less than 20 percent of whites were willing to eliminate the Court as a political institution, even “if it continually made decisions that the people disagree with” (641). Approximately 70 percent felt that people should be willing to do everything in their power to ensure the defeat of any law or statutory measure designed to eliminate the Court. Furthermore, almost 90 percent of their white respondents felt that the Court should keep its power to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional. Only when white respondents were asked whether Congress should limit the jurisdiction of the Court did less than 50 percent express support for the Court’s current institutional role.

A similar pattern held for Caldeira and Gibson’s measure of specific support. When respondents were asked whether the Court was “too liberal, too conservative, or about right in its decisions,” Caldeira and Gibson found that approximately 58 percent of their white respondents felt that the Court’s decisions were “about right”—a significant amount of specific support, given that the Court’s decisions often are controversial and polarizing.

Caldeira and Gibson found a similar pattern of results for black respondents, in that a majority of blacks in their sample expressed support for the Court as an institution on virtually all of the measures of diffuse support. Only when black respondents were asked whether Congress should limit the ability of the Court to decide certain types of
controversial issues did less than a majority (39.5 percent) take a position that was supportive of the Court (641). Despite the general similarities in the pattern of support between white and black respondents, black respondents were significantly less positive toward the Court on every measure of support than whites were. A follow-up paper by confirmed these differences and analyzed the reasons why blacks and whites differed in the levels of support given to the Court.

Segal (1995) used data from the 1974 and 1976 National Election studies and from the 1994 Ohio Political Survey to analyze levels of diffuse and specific support for the Court in a longitudinal sense. She found a significant amount of variation in the amount of support that Americans have had for the Court. Diffuse support, which typically is expected to be high and stable, decreased from 48.6 percent in 1974 to 44.4 percent in 1976. However, by 1994, diffuse support had increased to 53 percent, an increase of nearly 10 percentage points from the 1976 levels.

Segal also found a significant amount of variability in levels of specific support for the Court. The greatest level of agreement with the Court’s decisions and policy outputs occurred in 1974, when 49 percent of the sample said that the Court was doing a good or very good job. The 1976 data demonstrated an increased level of disagreement with the Court’s decisions, with only 40 percent of the 1976 sample expressing significant specific support for the Court. As Segal points out, however, a closer look at the data reveals an even more striking pattern indicating a very low level of specific support for the Court: two times as many respondents indicated that the Court had done a poor job in 1976 as in either 1974 or 1994, while only one-fifth as many of the respondents indicated that the Court had done a very good job (57).
Mondak and Smithey (1997) analyzed levels of confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court from 1972 to 1994 and compared those data to similar data for the U.S. Congress and the Executive Branch. Their data demonstrated that the public had more confidence in the Court, with 58 percent of the samples, on average, voicing support for the Court, compared to 47 percent for the executive branch and 46 percent for Congress (1119). Moreover, Mondak and Smithey found that support for the Court appeared more stable than support for the other two institutions—support varied within a 15 point range for the Supreme Court, while there was a 22 point range for the Executive branch and a 26 point range for Congress. The high level of support for the Court and the stability they observed led them to characterize public support for the Court as “quite distinctive” compared to that for Congress and the President (1119).

More recently, Kritzer (2001) used data from an ongoing national survey conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center to understand levels of diffuse and specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court both before and after the Court’s ruling that effectively ended the 2001 national election. He found that although the net effect of the ruling on public support for the Court essentially had no impact on overall support for the Court, the Court’s decision in the 2001 Bush v. Gore case had a significant short-term impact on different subsets of the population. Before the decision, 51.6 percent of Democrats had a favorable evaluation of the Court, compared to 45.8 percent of Republicans and 31.5 percent of Independents (36). However, after the decision was announced, only 34.1 percent of Democrats expressed favorable evaluations of the Court, while a record 58.9 percent of Republicans were favorable toward the Court (36). Independents were slightly more positive toward the Court, with 34.5 percent expressing
approval of the Court after the decision. Kritzer’s data and analysis provide further
evidence that different subgroups of the population at times will express very different
levels of support for the Court, and that levels of support for the Court can be responsive
to political events (a point discussed more directly below).

Finally, Caldeira, Gibson, and Spence (2003a) compared data from their 2001
national survey to the data used by Caldeira and Gibson (1992) and Gibson and Caldeira
(1992) and found that virtually all of the conclusions they drew in those works about
levels of diffuse and specific support were supported by data from their 2001 survey.
Even in the aftermath of the Court’s controversial decision ending the 2000 Presidential
election, overall levels of both diffuse and specific support were steady and even
increased modestly on some of the component measures of each type of support (9).
These findings led the authors to conclude that the U.S. Supreme Court continues to
enjoy a “deep reservoir of goodwill” in the minds of many citizens (21).

This review of scholarly findings about levels of support for the U.S. Supreme
Court in some respects has raised more questions than it has answered about the levels of
public support enjoyed by the Court. If one focuses on much of the early work in this
area, a generally negative picture emerges—one in which significantly less than 50
percent of respondents express support for, or confidence in, the Court. More recent
research, however, has found that for a variety of measures, a clear majority of the public
expresses support for the Court. Although this difference has yet to be resolved directly
in the literature, one speculation for the difference is that more recent analyses have paid
careful attention to issues of measurement and operationalization and arguably have
developed more precise measures of support than were employed in earlier works. One
other finding merits at least a brief mention. Analyses by Murphy and Tanenhaus (1975) and Caldeira (1986) looked at support in a longitudinal sense, and found that diffuse and specific support for the Court is not stable and does change over time.

Scholars also have studied levels of support for a variety of state and local courts. Lehne and Reynolds (1978) were among the first to look systematically at public support for a state-level court. With data from four statewide surveys of New Jersey residents, they looked at citizens’ approval of the job performance of the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1975 and 1976—a time of controversy due to decisions by the court that struck down the state’s school funding arrangements. They found that although the public’s support for the New Jersey state Supreme Court varied from a high of 47% to a low of 38%, the public’s approval rating ended approximately where it began in their time series.

More recently, Voelker and Kritzer (1996) reported data from the 1996 Wisconsin Court User Survey, a mail questionnaire used to assess citizens’ general satisfaction with Wisconsin state courts following any sort of visit to or experience with the state court system. The authors included 35 questions that were designed to measure citizens’ satisfaction with three core aspects of the services provided by state courts: case processing, issues related to personal safety and convenience, and the decisions made by state courts. Other items included on the questionnaire measured respondents’ general perceptions of the proceedings themselves.
The most striking pattern shown in their data is a relative absence of any sort of negative evaluation of the courts. Of the 35 items on the questionnaire, 25 had a majority of positive responses, eight evidenced neither a positive nor a negative majority, and only two items included on the questionnaire—which measured the cost of proceedings and knowledge about appeal procedures—had a majority of negative evaluations. Comparing this data to a smaller exit survey of citizens who used the courts, Voelker and Kritzer found that the results of the exit survey were even more positive than those of the mail survey. Follow-up work by Kritzer and Voelker (1998) came to very similar conclusions.

Other work has focused on levels of support for local courts. Flanagan et al. (1982) used national survey data collected by the National Opinion Research Center between 1965 and 1982 to analyze levels of support for the job performance of local criminal courts. The authors found that satisfaction with the sentencing behavior of local criminal courts declined significantly between 1965 and 1982. In 1965, 48 percent of respondents felt that the criminal courts in their area did not deal with criminals harshly enough and slightly under 40 percent of respondents felt that the courts dealt with criminals about right (67). By 1982, only 8 percent thought that the courts dealt with criminals “about right,” and an astonishing 86 percent felt that the criminal courts were not harsh enough in their sentencing decisions (67). Although the analysis focused only on the issue of perceived sentencing practices, Flanagan et al.’s work demonstrated that the public felt strongly that criminal courts in their area were too lenient, and that perception increased substantially over the 17 years covered in their analysis.
Findings II: Correlates of support

Thus far, the chapter has addressed issues of substantive coverage, theory, and findings related to the levels of public support found in previous work. Scholars also have made significant progress in understanding the demographic, environmental and attitudinal correlates of support for courts, and it is to this topic that the chapter now turns.

As with virtually all of the work in this general area, most of the research on the correlates of public support has focused on the U.S. Supreme Court. Kessel’s 1966 work again stands as one of the seminal works on this question. In addition to describing and explaining levels of support, Kessel sought to understand the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of supporters of the Court. His analysis of the correlates of support focused on a variety of core demographic variables: party identification, age, gender, religion, occupation, social class, income, and education. Somewhat surprisingly he found no statistically significant relationships between any of the variables and support for the Court.

However, he did observe some weak statistical tendencies. He found that age seemed to be associated with support, in that respondents under age 30 were most inclined to be supporters of the Court, while those over age 50 were most likely to be critics (186). He found that men were more likely than women to be strong supporters of the Court, and that women were more likely than men to be neutral (186). As we would expect, respondents with college degrees tended to be supporters of the Court, while those with a high school education or less were most likely to be critical of the Court and its policies (187). These tendencies notwithstanding, Kessel noted that supporters and
critics of the Court had much in common: “Strong supporters have the same
demographic characteristics as strong opponents. Mild supporters resemble mild critics.
And so on” (187). Thus, one can conclude from Kessel’s analysis that among the distinct
groups of supporters and critics of the Court, “every type of person is to be found in
every category” (185).

Work by Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968) came to a different conclusion about the
correlates of diffuse and specific support. They found that 16 percent of their
respondents had high levels of both diffuse and specific support, while 34 percent
expressed low levels of diffuse and specific support (376). They argued that the
differences in the patterns of support expressed by these two groups of respondents were
best accounted for by their positions on a variety of policy issues—strong supporters
(those in the first group) tended to approve of the Court’s policies, while weak supporters
(those in the second group) tended not to approve of the various policy issues (376).
Additionally, they found that diffuse support was predicted by region of the country and
race, with southerners and whites expressing greater support for the Court as an
institution. Partisanship also exhibited a significant relationship to support, in that
Republicans in their dataset tended to be stronger supporters of the Court than
Democrats.

A follow-up analysis of specific and diffuse support by Tanenhaus and Murphy
(1981) found slightly different results, in that partisanship no longer was a significant
correlate of diffuse support. However, the other predictors remained significant, and
respondents’ issue positions again emerged as especially strong correlates of support for
the Court and for the patterns of support expressed by respondents.
Handberg and Maddox (1982) built on the work done by Kessel and Murphy and Tanenhaus by focusing primarily on understanding the correlates of support – not on analyzing the levels of support for the Court. Their goal was to use national survey data to create a comprehensive demographic profile of supporters of the U.S. Supreme Court. They found that although partisanship was not significantly related to support for the Court, political efficacy had a very strong relationship to support (339-340). Moreover, demographic variables such as race and education also were important in determining who supported the Court (339, 342). Looking at these results substantively demonstrates that it was blacks and respondents with higher levels of education (and concomitantly, higher levels of efficacy) who were most likely to voice strong support for the Court (345).

Caldeira’s 1986 time-series analysis took a very different approach to this question by testing the influence of external social, political, and judicial factors on confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court. Among the correlates Caldeira included in his model were national economic conditions, presidential popularity, judicial activism, salience of the Court to the public, crime, public attitudes toward the rights of criminal and civil defendants, and political events, such as the Watergate scandal (1214-1217).

Caldeira found that over the period from 1966 to 1984, confidence in the Court was strongly responsive to external political events—especially during and after the Watergate scandal, when confidence in the Court increased by approximately ten percentage points (1219). Confidence in the President also emerged as a significant correlate of confidence in the Court. In contrast, however, national economic conditions—as measured by rates of crime, unemployment, and inflation—had no
significant influence on confidence in the Court. Caldeira also found that judicial actions influenced public confidence for the Court—especially judicial support for the accused, the public salience of the Court, and levels of judicial activism, as measured by invalidations of federal laws. Salience of the Court tended to increase confidence in the Court, while judicial support for the accused and perceptions of judicial activism had negative impacts on confidence in the Court. Caldeira’s key finding was that external environmental variables—not just demographic and attitudinal variables of respondents—could influence levels of public support for the Court.

As noted previously, Caldeira and Gibson (1992) focused just on diffuse support for the Court. They hypothesized that value orientations toward liberty, social order, and democratic norms were the correlates that best explained diffuse support and tested this hypothesis with data from the 1987 General Social Survey. In contrast to previous work, Caldeira and Gibson found that respondents’ feelings of trust and efficacy had no significant relationship to diffuse support. Moreover, with the exception of abortion and racial segregation, most policy preferences had little influence on respondents’ diffuse support for the Court. In keeping with their hypothesis, Caldeira and Gibson found that political values such as liberty and democracy were very strong predictors of diffuse support for the Court (650). Among opinion leaders, however, the results were slightly different. Opinion leaders’ positions on abortion and legalization of marijuana also were significant predictors of diffuse support, as was the leaders’ commitment to liberty. Finally, Caldeira and Gibson found race to be a significant correlate of support, with whites expressing higher levels of support for the Court than blacks (650).
Gibson and Caldeira (1992) looked further at their finding of race as a correlate of support and attempted to better understand how race affected diffuse support for the Court. They hypothesized that for blacks, diffuse support and specific support would be closely related, as blacks would tend to be less tolerant of institutions making “wrong decisions.” Based on this hypothesis, Gibson and Caldeira expected that as the Court’s decisions and outputs became more conservative during the 1970s and 1980s, blacks would become less willing to support the Court as an institution. Using data collected as part of the 1987 General Social Survey, Gibson and Caldeira found that although both blacks and whites expressed favorable attitudes toward the Court as an institution, blacks showed significantly less support for the Court than whites on every measure of support (1128). At the same time, Gibson and Caldeira argued that blacks’ attitudes toward the Court were not as negative as one would predict if those attitudes were formed only on the basis of the Reagan-era Court’s fairly conservative outlook. Gibson and Caldeira explained this seeming anomaly by pointing to blacks’ historical memory of the Warren Court and a “residue of positive affect” stemming from the policy gains made during that era (1140). Looking at black respondents from a cohort perspective, they found (as one would expect) that age was a significant predictor of support. Older blacks (i.e., those who lived through the Warren era) were most supportive and exhibited the highest degree of stability in their positive orientations (1140). Aside from finding further evidence that race would seem to be a correlate of support, Gibson and Caldeira’s analysis also demonstrated that the Court’s own past actions and decisions could function as a significant correlate of diffuse support.
More recently, Segal (1995) explored the correlates of support for the U.S. Supreme Court in her analysis of the relationship between diffuse and specific support. Although she found that diffuse support was related to a variety of demographic and political/attitudinal variables, the strength and significance of the relationships varied substantially across the three years covered in her data. Segal found that although respondents’ race, gender, and level of education were significantly related to diffuse support, these relationships were weak and accounted for only a small portion of the variation in support for the Court in the years she analyzed. In all three years, respondents in her analysis who were white, female, and highly educated were most likely to express high levels of diffuse support for the Court (61). Other variables also emerged as significant predictors of support but were not consistently significant in all three of her datasets. For example, ideology and partisanship were significantly related to support in 1974, but not in 1976 or 1994. Similarly, issue positions were strong correlates of support in both 1976 and 1994, with liberal positions on the rights of the accused, school busing, equality for women, and public school funding being associated with greater support for the Court (64). Most notably, however, Segal found that specific support for the decisions of the Court emerged as a significant correlate of diffuse support in all three years she analyzed—respondents who had a favorable view of the Court’s policies and outputs also expressed the greatest support for the Court as a political institution (68).

Hoekstra’s (2000) analysis of opinions toward the Court built implicitly on Segal’s work, and her analysis yielded similar results, finding that high-salience decisions by the Court are noticed by members of the public. Consistent with the approach I adopt
in chapters 4 and 5, she found also that higher levels of education and political knowledge increased the probability of local respondents hearing about a Court decision (94). More importantly, she found that these decisions influenced overall evaluations of the Court by local respondents who were directly affected by the decision, with the influence of the decision being directly dependent on geographic proximity to the area affected by the decision (97). However, more recent work by Gibson, Caldeira and Spence (2003a) came to a slightly different conclusion, finding that negative affect toward the Court’s decision ending the 2000 Presidential election had little impact on levels of diffuse support for the Court.

Although the literature studying support for state and local courts is generally much less sophisticated than that for the U.S. Supreme Court, scholars studying support for these courts have attempted to understand the correlates of support for these institutions. One of the earliest works to analyze the correlates of support for a state-level court was Lehne and Reynolds’ 1978 study of public support for the New Jersey state Supreme Court. Their analysis found that the primary correlates of support were support for the Governor and support for the state legislature. That is, respondents in their surveys who supported the Governor and state legislature also were very likely to express high levels of support for the New Jersey state supreme court. They found limited evidence that ideology was a significant predictor of support, but it attained statistical significance in only one of the three waves of their data collection efforts.

Voelker and Kritzer (1996) analyzed levels of support for the state court system in Wisconsin and found a different set of variables to be significant predictors of support. The most consistent relationship they found was between gender and evaluations, with
female respondents generally reporting more positive evaluations of their experience in the Wisconsin courts than male respondents. Although the difference between men and women was small and statistically insignificant in many cases, the pattern they observed occurred across all but one of the 35 items in their survey instrument. Comparing these results to data obtained from a smaller exit survey of citizens administered as they were leaving a court proceeding, Voelker and Kritzer found that the results of the exit survey were uniformly more positive than those of the mail survey. They concluded from this finding that, “Going to court actually tends to result in a short-term improvement in people’s views of the courts. However, the ‘good feelings’ produced by actual contact fade relatively rapidly” (17). Thus, Voelker and Kritzer’s work pointed to both gender and experience with the courts as important correlates of support for state courts.

Olson and Huth (1998) built on Voelker and Kritzer’s work and argued that because many more people have direct experience with local trial courts, or at very least, have heard secondhand accounts from neighbors, relatives, and friends with experience, the correlates of support for lower courts differ significantly from those for the U.S. Supreme Court (42). As they noted, national survey data showed that approximately 43 percent of the public has had some sort of experience with the local court system (42). Moreover, they argued that personal experience could impact how citizens evaluate public institutions. As Olson and Huth stated, “Differences in the relationship between experience and support are no doubt due to differences in the quality of the experience. Presumably, those who have positive experiences are likely to be more supportive than those who have negative experiences” (43). This argument, of course, is quite different from Voelker and Kritzer’s finding that the residual effect of experience decays rapidly.
Olson and Huth tested their argument using data obtained from a survey of Utah state residents. They hypothesized that experience and other attitudinal and demographic variables found to be important in other research—including confidence in government, party identification, attentiveness to the courts, and perceptions of justice and fairness—would be associated with support for lower courts. For respondents who had experience with the courts, they found that perceptions of the fairness of court proceedings were strong correlates of support, thus echoing Tyler’s (1988) conclusions regarding the importance of procedural fairness as a correlate of institutional legitimacy and support. For respondents with no experience with the courts, however, general confidence in government proved to be the most important correlate of support for Utah state courts—a result that echoes Caldeira and Gibson’s (1992) conclusions about the correlates of support for the U.S. Supreme Court. Thus, Olson and Huth pointed to experience as a critical correlate of support and found that experience mediated the impact of other correlates of support. Notably, work by Kritzer and Voelker (1998) largely duplicates these conclusions.

Flanagan et al. (1982) used national survey data to test the influence of standard demographic variables such as gender and age, attitudinal variables such as support for the police, and experiential variables such as crime victimization, on support for state and local criminal courts on support for state and local criminal courts. They found that attitudinal and demographic variables were important predictors of support for criminal courts, with age displaying an especially strong negative relationship to support for the criminal courts; in contrast, socioeconomic status had a strong positive relationship, with those in the working class being least likely to hold favorable perceptions of criminal
courts (75). Other attitudinal and experiential variables—such as support for prison construction, support for the death penalty, and perceptions of a “national crime problem”-- also were found to have significant negative relationships with support for criminal courts. Somewhat surprisingly, none of the experiential variables were significant predictors of support. These results led Flanagan et al., to argue that that scholars studying support for lower courts must include both demographic and attitudinal variables in predictive models of support for state and local courts.

Finally, Wenzel, Bowler, and Lanoue (2003) studied the correlates of diffuse support for local courts. They sought to create a comprehensive model of public opinion toward local courts and included variables in their model that measured the method of selection of judges on each court, the nature of respondents’ experience with the local court system, respondents’ media usage, a measure of specific support, and a variety of standard demographic measures. They found that diffuse and specific support for local courts had a strong and direct reciprocal relationship. Moreover, their analysis found again that the courtroom experiences of individual respondents had a significant influence on levels of diffuse support expressed by citizens for their local courts, with service as a juror being an especially strong predictor of diffuse support (200). However, the relationship went in the opposite direction for respondents who had experience as defendants in local courts. Their work contributes to our understanding of support for state and local courts by applying the concepts of diffuse and specific support successfully at the sub-national level, and by finding that the influence of experience with the court system on support for local courts depends on the type of experience a respondent has with his or her local court system.
Differences in support for state and local courts and the U.S. Supreme Court

This review of the literature has summarized the findings of many different scholarly analyses and has been organized around a variety of important dimensions. At this point, it is worthwhile to summarize what scholars know about differences in support for state and local courts and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Research at the national level has demonstrated that although a small majority of citizens generally express support for the U.S. Supreme Court as an institution, many fewer citizens support its specific outputs, regardless of the environmental context. In contrast, however, research on support for state and local courts has found seemingly higher levels of support, with strong majorities of citizens expressing support of both the courts as institutions and of their policy outputs. Additional research at both the state and the national levels also has demonstrated that patterns of support can and often will fluctuate over time, in response to a variety of factors that include external political events and the decisions and outputs of the court.

Furthermore, scholars have found that the correlates of support for the U.S. Supreme Court and for state and local courts differ significantly in many cases. At the national level, extensive research has shown that political events, contextual factors, demographic characteristics of survey respondents, and the behavior of the justices themselves all can influence how much support is offered to the U.S. Supreme Court. Among other variables of interest, scholars have found efficacy and the adherence to basic political values, such as liberty, to be strong predictors of support for the Supreme Court. Scholars also have found significant evidence that race is related to support, since
minority respondents seemed to exhibit less support for the Court than did white respondents. Additional research has provided evidence of relationships between other demographic variables, such as education and age, and support for the Supreme Court. More recent work (Segal 1995) even has argued that the diffuse and specific support for the Court are related and that specific support (or support for outputs of the Court) can be a source of diffuse support for the institution.

The small body of research on support for courts at the sub-national level generally has come to different conclusions. In keeping with findings for the U.S. Supreme Court, scholars have found that support for lower courts is responsive to the political context and is related to efficacy, support for other state-level political institutions, and basic demographic variables such as socioeconomic status. However, attitudes on public policy issues such as support for prison construction have been shown to influence support for lower courts, as have citizens’ perceptions of crime and other social problems. Scholars have found two major differences between support for lower courts and for the U.S. Supreme Court. First, research demonstrates that perceptions of fairness and social justice appear to function as significant correlates of support for state and local courts. More importantly, however, the research has found strong evidence that experience with state and local court systems functions as an important correlate of support for state and local courts, with the impact of experience depending on the nature of the interaction with the state or local court.
As noted in the introduction to this chapter, it is necessary to have an understanding of the current state of scholarly knowledge on support for courts in order to understand how my research both complement and extend previous work on support for courts. The research reported in the forthcoming chapters of my dissertation complements the existing literature by describing levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and by explaining the correlates of that support—two objectives that have figured prominently in much of the existing scholarly work on this topic. At the same time, my work extends our knowledge about support for courts in four different ways. First, I focus on support for the Ohio Supreme Court—a state level court that has not been studied by scholars interested in support for courts. Second, I draw upon the work of Zaller (1992) to develop a more comprehensive and detailed theoretical framework for support for courts—one that I argue helps illuminate how citizens form judgments of support and how they change those judgments over time. In chapter 5, I report data from a unique survey-based experiment that was designed to test whether elite messages operate as one source of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In pursuing my third objective, my research focuses on an aspect of the research question that virtually all scholars have ignored—that of the internal and exogenous sources of the support expressed by citizens for courts. Finally, chapter 6 uses my experimental data in a series of multivariate analyses that describe and explain patterns of support held by a variety of subgroups of respondents in my sample.
In the next chapter, I focus further on issues of theory and draw on the work of Zaller (1992) to develop a new theoretical framework that I use to guide the analyses I present in chapters 4 and 5. I report new data in chapter 4 that allow me to describe levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and to analyze the correlates of that support. In chapter 6, I test whether elite messages operate as one source of support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
CHAPTER 3

A new theoretical approach to understanding support for courts

Issues of theory are critically important to research on support for courts, in that theoretical frameworks provide guidance to scholars on issues of conceptualization, operationalization, and analysis. The literature review in the previous chapter demonstrated that scholars have used a wide range of theoretical frameworks and orientations to guide their work on support for courts. Among these are widely divergent theoretical frameworks rooted in systems theory, social psychological theories, theories of pre-adult socialization, and theories based on citizens’ perceptions about courts. This chapter begins with the simple premise that understanding support for courts requires a comprehensive and realistic theoretical framework of attitude formation and change, and it articulates a new theoretical framework based upon the work of Zaller (1992). From there, the chapter uses this Zaller-based framework to develop testable hypotheses and expectations about the two core objectives of my dissertation—namely, describing and explaining levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and testing the influence of elite discourse on support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

The first, and arguably most obvious, question concerns what a theoretical framework should explain about support for courts. At a minimum, any truly comprehensive theoretical explanation of support should do two things: (1) explain why citizens support courts, and (2) explain observed patterns of support, both cross-sectionally, and longitudinally. Ideally, of course, such a framework also would be
capable of accounting for institutional and environmental differences in support between various levels and types of courts. The literature review in the previous chapter demonstrated that although scholars have applied a variety of theoretical frameworks to their research in this area, many of the existing theoretical frameworks and much of the literature on support for courts have ignored the question of why citizens support courts. My dissertation does as well, because it is not possible to develop an answer to this question for the Ohio Supreme Court with my data.

This omission is not surprising, as answering this question is an extremely difficult task. Most scholars simply assume that many citizens do support courts and other political institutions and have focused their attention instead on describing levels of citizen support and on explaining the correlates of that support. To the extent that citizens’ reasons for supporting the courts have a strong relationship to actual patterns of support observed by scholars, this theoretical omission is unfortunate. In an ideal sense, one would hope that scholars would develop an understanding of why citizens support courts and then use that information to help them understand citizens’ patterns of support for courts. As chapter 2 demonstrated, however, scholars have focused primarily on describing patterns of support for courts, changes in those patterns over time, and correlates of support for courts.

Because Zaller’s (1992) theoretical framework is designed to explain processes of attitude formation and change, applying it to the study of support for courts provides better and more realistic answers to many of the theoretical questions posed above than most other existing frameworks of support. Zaller’s framework is well-suited to the question of support for the Ohio Supreme Court in that it articulates plausible
mechanisms of support and outlines processes for changes in support; the significant cost to these advantages, however, is that his framework is unable in large measure to explain why citizens support courts. That does not mean, however, that the question of why citizens support courts is unimportant. Instead, I view this as a critically important research question that is beyond the scope the present analysis. The chapter turns next to reviewing Zaller’s theoretical framework and to applying it to the research question of support for courts.

Subsequent chapters use the framework outlined below to explain levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, along with the impact of elite messages on observed levels of support.

**Zaller’s Theoretical Framework**

As noted above, Zaller’s theoretical framework was not designed to explain public support for courts. Instead, Zaller’s goal was to create a single theoretical framework that was capable of explaining both the formation of public attitudes toward any political institution or attitude object and changes to those attitudes over time (1). In a practical sense, his 1992 analysis of the nature of public opinion attempted to unite what he saw as a fragmented literature in public opinion by creating a comprehensive theory that was capable of explaining both the nature of mass attitudes and the nature of attitude formation and change.
Zaller based his theory largely on three variables—media coverage/elite discourse, political awareness, and political values. He sought to show how variations in the information carried in elite discourse, individual differences in attention to this information, and individual differences in political values and predispositions interacted and in doing so determined public opinion and public attitudes.

Political elites are the first of the three key, “cornerstone,” variables in Zaller’s theory (6-16). He defined political elites as politicians, government officials, policy specialists, and journalists. At first, his reliance on external political elites and the mass media as a cornerstone of his theory may seem curious—after all, he was attempting to explain how individual citizens form opinions and how those opinions change over time. Building implicitly on the work of Downs (1957), Zaller argued that citizens have limited “ranges” (16). Becoming informed about political matters often is time consuming and costly, and as a result, most citizens have low levels of information about politics. Even if citizens are able to obtain substantial information about an issue, they often have a limited ability (or limited motivation) to comprehend tough events or the meaning of political information they receive. This conception of the mass public led Zaller to argue that members of the public generally need elites and elite discourse as “shortcuts” of sorts to help them understand the meaning of political information. Elites and elite discourse provide extensive political information to ordinary citizens, and they frame and simplify political events in ways that make the information resonate with the public.

According to Zaller, elites do this in two ways—first, by providing persuasive messages that contain arguments for taking one position over another; and second, by sending cueing messages that provide contextual information that helps individuals link
persuasive messages with their values and predispositions. Both types of messages contained in elite discourse are important because they help citizens see both the meaning of political information and its importance in their everyday life. As will be discussed more fully below, Zaller’s opinion formation and opinion change processes articulate a clear conception of elite leadership of mass opinion.

Political awareness, the second key variable in Zaller’s theory, was defined by him as the extent to which individuals pay attention to politics and understand what they have encountered. He argued that more politically aware citizens were more likely than low-knowledge citizens to hear, understand, and internalize the elite messages they encountered (but, depending on their predispositions, were not necessarily more likely to accept the arguments contained in those messages). In that sense, political awareness functions in Zaller’s framework as a tool that allows citizens to participate in the political process in a meaningful and systematic manner.

Citizens’ political predispositions are the third central variable in Zaller’s framework (22). Zaller characterized these predispositions as, “stable, individual-level traits that regulated the acceptance or rejection of the political messages and information received by individual citizens,” and saw values as an especially important type of predisposition (22-24). More importantly, he argued that the impact of predispositions on opinion formation and change depended squarely on citizens having enough information to realize that the predispositions were relevant to the decision to support or oppose a policy or candidate (24).
Zaller argued that citizens form opinions using “top of the head” thinking. His model of opinion formation (which he calls the R-A-S model, for “receive-accept-sample”) posited that citizens are continuously exposed to political information—much of which is aimed at shifting their opinions on a given political topic in either a liberal or conservative direction. Because most citizens pay very little attention to politics in this country, they tend not to be critical about the information they internalize. Consequently, Zaller argued that many citizens fill their minds with information and arguments (what Zaller calls “considerations”) about an issue, candidate, or policy that are only partially consistent (40, 65, 70). When these citizens are asked a question about a political matter or political institution, Zaller argued that individuals formed opinions by averaging over a non-random but stochastic sample of relevant considerations, where a consideration was defined as any reason that might induce an individual to decide an issue one way or another. More simply, when asked for an opinion on any sort of political issue, citizens operating according to Zaller’s model call up as many relevant ideas and arguments as possible and use their content to choose between the options presented (58). Because citizens generally have a limited ability to integrate their considerations on any given issue, the opinion they form may be based only on the one or two considerations that appear most accessible and important (58). Cueing messages found in elite discourse help determine which considerations are most accessible and salient (41).
At this point, Zaller’s R-A-S model may seem little more than a fancy way of stating that most of the public’s attitudes are random, and thus, meaningless. The basic argument of his model is simply that citizens normally do not have fixed attitudes on most given issues, but instead form opinions based on their processing of available considerations. As a result, instability in the public’s opinions is both natural and expected.

Zaller argued that the charge of “top-of-the-head,” or meaningless, opinions was most applicable to the least informed citizens, and much less applicable to citizens with high political awareness (93). In his view, citizens with higher levels of political awareness also tended to be more selective about the information they internalized; as a result, they also were more likely to internalize considerations that were consistent with their values and which in general were more internally consistent as a group (93).

Because the mass public, especially those with the lowest levels of political knowledge, were most likely to have banks of considerations that were contradictory, Zaller argued it was natural for the public to exhibit some degree of ambivalence in their opinions (91-93). He even noted that on some issues citizens could internalize two completely contradictory sets of considerations about the same issue without needing to resolve the conflict (93). This natural ambivalence functioned as a significant source of over-time instability in public opinion data about political topics.

Moreover, Zaller argued that most people in most cases would have little need to reconcile or even recognize these competing considerations. Each consideration was seen by him to be genuine feeling and capable of co-existing with opposing considerations (93). Depending on the context in which a citizen forms an opinion, and
thus on the relative salience of the opposing considerations, both sets of considerations could even be capable—albeit at different times—of controlling the opinion voiced by a citizen on a given topic (93).

Although ambivalence and “contradictory considerations” could function as significant sources of instability, Zaller also held that instability in citizens’ opinions also could result from the stochastic averaging process citizens engage in when they are called upon to form and express an opinion (92). As long as the flow of political information to citizens was steady, response instability in this sense could be due to shifts in mixture of considerations that were most accessible, or “on the top of the head.” This gets back to his notion of citizens averaging across considerations and in a purely statistical sense can be described as chance variability around a stable central tendency. By virtue of more internally consistent considerations, Zaller argued there would be less of this chance variability exhibited by more politically aware people, along with lower levels of chance variability related to specific issues from those citizens who care specifically about those issues (Converse’s notion of issue publics).
To this point, over time instability in citizens’ opinions has been explained as a function of contradictory considerations and of the averaging process citizens engage in as they use their considerations to form an opinion—both of which are “internal” causes of instability. However, changes in messages also can serve as an external cause of instability in the public’s opinions. Simply, popular and elite discourse about many issues often changes significantly over time. Political events and changes in societal values can change the meaning and societal impact of issues; similarly, new information can “re-frame” an issue by changing the merit and/or impact of existing considerations about an issue.

These changes often result in a changing balance and mixture of liberal and conservative arguments that citizens hold about political issues (119). If the public is exposed to a shifting balance of liberal and conservative messages over time, Zaller argued that the balance of considerations in their heads would shift in favor of the more recent ones. Not surprisingly, Zaller also held that less politically aware citizens who internalized a lot of considerations that were only partially consistent with each other would be most likely to demonstrate over time instability in their opinions due to shifts in the ideological balance of elite messages (155). Figure 3.1 (below) lists the four formal axioms that Zaller developed to summarize his model of opinion formation and change.
Reception Axiom: The greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely s/he is to be exposed to and to comprehend political messages about an issue.

Resistance Axiom: People resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but only to the extent that they have enough contextual information to see connections between the messages and their predispositions.

Accessibility Axiom: The more recently a consideration has been called to mind/thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration from memory, and the more likely it will be influential in the opinion formation process.

Response axiom: Individuals form opinions by averaging across considerations that are immediately salient/accessible.

Figure 3.1: Major Formal Axioms and Deductions from the R-A-S Model; Adapted from Zaller (1992, 42-49)

Zaller’s theoretical framework to this point has focused only on the process of opinion formation and change in the presence of one argument/message. However, in a real political situation, citizens are likely to face two (or more) sets of opposing arguments. Both are likely to be strong and persuasive, and this makes it important for the model also to account for processes of opinion change in the face of multiple messages.

Zaller argued that if elites achieve consensus regarding a “mainstream” policy and send clear messages to the public expressing that consensus, an indoctrination effect would exist (98, 210). Citizens, especially the more politically aware, will receive those messages and as a result, be likely to follow the elite consensus position (167-169). If elites disagree, Zaller argued (as before) that the more aware members of the public would be more likely to receive and internalize only the messages that are consistent with their underlying predispositions and values; messages that were in conflict with their
values would simply be ignored or dismissed (148, 210). The effect in this situation promotes polarization along ideological lines, especially among the most aware members of the public (148). Zaller also noted that the mainstream and polarization effects were not always mutually exclusive and highlighted the 1991 Gulf War as an example of a political issue in which both the mainstream and polarization effects occurred (104; see also Zaller, 1994). However, he was careful to point out that attitude change in his R-A-S model is not the replacement of one crystallized structure with another (104).

Instead, attitude change processes were conceptualized as long-term changes in the mixture (and the salience) of considerations that alter how people express attitudes (122-123). Changing the mixture of considerations changes the probabilities that individual considerations will be accessed when citizens are called upon to form an opinion—thus making elite messages, along with the mainstream and polarization effects, central parts of changes in public opinion (123). Zaller’s notion of change, of course, was predicated on both the reception and acceptance of at least some new considerations.

More formally, Zaller’s discussion of attitude formation and change in the presence of multiple information flows was focused around a two-message model in which both a dominant and a (usually weaker) countervailing message existed (185). The central idea of his two-message model was that citizens often are exposed to two communication flows—one on each side of a political issue (189). At noted above, changes in the intensity of one or both of the messages could change the considerations that comprised citizens’ belief systems, and in doing so, could change the opinions expressed by citizens (189). Moreover, multiple, opposing messages were likely to have different effects in different segments of the public, depending on the intensity of the
message, on the level of political awareness of the specific sub-population in question, and on the underlying predispositions of the population (189). As will be described more fully below, one of the key objectives of my dissertation will be to test Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite-mass opinion linkage in the domain of the courts, and in doing so, to assess the influence of elite discourse on support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Attitude change in Zaller’s framework is dependent on two individual-level factors—reception of messages and acceptance (118-119). More politically aware citizens are more likely to receive and comprehend change-inducing messages (122, 151). Acceptance also hinges on political awareness, because politically aware citizens--by virtue of their more extensive and more homogenous banks of considerations--are better equipped to resist persuasive communications that are inconsistent with their basic values than less aware people. However, Zaller argued that citizens—even the most politically aware--generally have a limited ability to resist elite messages if elites are united on a mainstream issue.

Attitude change processes in Zaller’s framework also could be influenced by message level factors of intensity and topic (151, 152). Regarding intensity, Zaller held that some messages simply had more ability than others to influence a public that pays only selective attention to politics (152). In general, the lower the intensity of a message, the smaller the amount of attitude change that can occur--especially among less aware people. The topic of a message also was important, in that messages vary in the extent to which they address issues on which the public has a large store of existing considerations. Intense messages addressing new concerns and issues are more likely to produce
significant change since citizens have smaller established banks of considerations on those issues (152). In keeping with the above, however, Zaller argued strongly that attitude change due to message-level factors would be most concentrated among moderately aware citizens, even on “familiar” issues, due to those citizens having less extensive and homogenous banks of considerations than high awareness citizens, the ability to receive elite messages, and a lower likelihood of rejecting any elite messages they receive (189, 210).

Simply, Zaller’s two-message model of attitude change holds that public attitudes toward many major issues are responses to the relative intensity of competing political communications from on the issues (190). When elites are unified on a mainstream issue, the public is likely to respond in a non-ideological way in the direction of the elite position. However, when elites disagree along partisan or ideological lines, the public’s response will become ideological as well, with the most politically aware citizens responding most ideologically the competing messages (209). Finally, the degree of this polarization is dependent upon the relative intensity of the opposing information flows (207).

Although Zaller’s model inherently is one of elite leadership of mass opinions, he did not claim that individuals are passive receptacles of whatever elites want them to believe (287). Instead, he argued that citizens pick and choose their opinion on a given issue using the menu of elite messages that they have been exposed to, internalized, and which they can recall (287). Their predispositions and values determine which considerations they are likely and able to receive and internalize. This discussion of Zaller’s framework and its conclusions leads me to articulate an assumption about the
nature of public opinion that is central to my dissertation. Simply, my work assumes that that there are no true attitudes in a Conversian sense; instead, I accept the Zaller-based premise that the public tends to have a collection of poorly-integrated considerations that they bring to bear to form opinions as needed on any sort of political topic (Zaller 118).

A second, and related, assumption used in my work is that when evaluating political information, citizens use political awareness and their political predispositions together to help them form opinions from their available considerations on whatever political topic is in question.

**Zaller’s framework and the study of support for courts**

Zaller’s theoretical framework would seem to have great potential for guiding analyses of public support for courts. First, it does not require that citizens have full information about the attitude object, a requirement of any plausible theoretical explanation, given the low levels of salience and knowledge about the Ohio Supreme Court. Many of the theoretical frameworks used in previous work assume that citizens will act independently to obtain information about courts and use that information to develop opinions on whether they support courts as institutions and whether they support the policy outputs of courts.

A long line of scholarly work in political science starting with Downs (1957) and continuing to the present day (DelliCarpini and Keeter, 1997) has concluded that citizens can be considered rational actors when it comes to learning about politics. Obtaining political information and knowledge about political institutions is difficult for most citizens, and these models have argued that as a result of high information costs, citizens usually will have very low levels of political knowledge. Because Zaller’s framework
assumes that citizens approximate rationality in their acquisition of information, his model is capable of (and arguably, tailored to) dealing with the low levels of political knowledge and ideological constraint we would expect to see when respondents are asked to form opinions on the Ohio Supreme Court. By virtue of allowing for imperfect information, the model does not require that citizens be consistent or rational in their opinions or in the decision calculus that underlies them—something that adds to the face validity of the framework for studying support for courts.

Second, Zaller’s theory about the nature and origins of public opinion frames the research question of support for courts fundamentally as an issue of elite leadership of mass opinions. This reliance on an explicit elite-mass linkage in opinion formation and change processes allows the framework—in the absence of any significant motivation by average citizens to receive and process information about courts—to function as a plausible mechanism of information acquisition and transmission for support for courts. It also makes his framework especially applicable for studying support for courts given their low levels of salience and the generally low motivation for citizens to acquire and process information about them. Virtually all of the existing theoretical models on support for courts simply assume that citizens will be informed, and Zaller’s framework focuses much-needed attention on how citizens acquire even minimal information about courts and court decisions. In turn, this mechanism does much to explain changes in overall patterns of support and also how individual judgments of support are made.

An additional strength of Zaller’s framework is that it bases the opinions expressed by citizens on a fluid bank of considerations, thus allowing the framework to account for rapid changes in the salience of courts (or in the salience of specific decisions
made by specific courts), and for the impact of those changes on levels of diffuse and specific support. Generally, of course, courts tend to be low-salience institutions that have relatively little significant impact on the day-to-day activities of citizens. However, certain decisions by their very nature are controversial, highly salient, and impact the everyday lives of the public. For example, decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court on abortion routinely engender demonstrations by citizens and extensive coverage by the news media. Similarly, recent decisions by the Ohio Supreme Court striking down the state of Ohio’s school funding system received extensive media coverage and were perceived to have a significant impact on the everyday lives of average citizens, especially those with school-age children. These types of decisions often (though not always) can be characterized by a large amount of participation by (and reaction from) political elites, with elites presenting a single, unified message supporting or opposing the decisions in some cases, and multiple, contradictory messages in others.

These types of “high salience” situations in which there is significant participation from the media and political elites can be expected to influence the ideological and substantive mixture of considerations citizens have on issues related to support for courts, and thus, to influence support for courts. In that sense, one of the advantages of Zaller’s framework is that it is capable of accounting for rapid changes in the salience of courts, for resulting changes in support for courts, and for the effects of changes in courts’ larger social and political environments on support for courts.

As noted previously, my dissertation has two separate but related objectives. First, it seeks to describe and explain levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Second, it will apply Zaller’s one-message and two message models of elite
communication to support for the Ohio Supreme Court and in doing so, test whether his mainstream and polarization effects influence support for the court. Applying Zaller’s framework to both of these objectives yields a number of testable theoretical predictions and expectations that follow below. It is my hope that rigorous empirical tests of the hypotheses and expectations will improve our understanding of the nature and dynamics of support for courts.

The first analytical goal of my dissertation is to describe and explain overall levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In order to achieve this goal, the following chapter presents data collected as part of the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll and uses that data to describe overall levels of diffuse and specific support for the court. It also explains the correlates of diffuse and specific support by using multivariate analyses to test the influence of standard demographic correlates of support—as identified in previous literature on public opinion and support for courts more generally. Extensive research in political science has found that demographic variables such as race, income, education, party identification and age often are good predictors of political behavior such as political participation and voting (Page and Jones, 1973; Shanks and Miller, 1990; Campbell, et al; 1960). Other research has found demographic variables to be significant influences on political attitudes (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, Caldeira and Gibson, 1992).

More importantly, the literature review in chapter 2 demonstrated that scholars also have found evidence that the demographic characteristics of survey respondents are related to their expressions of support for courts. For example, Handberg and Maddox (1982) found relationships between the race and education level of respondents and the
levels of support they voiced for the U.S. Supreme Court; specifically, blacks with higher levels of education voiced the highest degree of support for the Court. Caldeira and Gibson (1992) found that race was a very significant predictor of support for the Court and that blacks were less supportive of the Court in general than whites. They also found a significant age effect among their black respondents, in that older blacks tended to be more supportive of the Court.

Work on lower courts by Flanagan et al., found that socioeconomic status was related to support for lower and trial courts, and Voelker and Kritzer (1996) found evidence of a gender effect, in that women tended to be more supportive of the Wisconsin state court system than men. In keeping with the findings of this previous literature, I will focus primarily on understanding the influence of respondents’ age, race, gender, party identification, income, and education levels on support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Additionally, given the significant recent role of the court in helping to determine how the state of Ohio will fund its public schools, these analyses also will test for the presence of children in a respondent’s household as a correlate of diffuse and specific support.

Zaller argued strongly that political knowledge mediates opinion formation processes. Because support for the Ohio Supreme Court can be considered in this framework to be the end result of an opinion formation process, I hypothesize that high-knowledge and low-knowledge respondents will have slightly different opinion formation and change processes, and thus, that the respondents in these groups will display different correlates of diffuse and specific support. To further refine this, I will test the correlates of support for these two groups separately.
Unfortunately, one limitation of the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll was that it did not include explicit measures of political knowledge. However, it did include a significant battery of measures of media attention and newspaper readership, and I will use these media attention variables as surrogates for political knowledge. This operationalization clearly is sub-optimal and in many ways, problematic. However, it is required by data limitations, and it is designed to provide a very limited “first cut” understanding of how political knowledge might mediate the relationships between significant correlates of support and my dependent variables of diffuse and specific support.

Fulfilling my first goal of my dissertation of describing and explaining levels of support clearly is a basic task. However, this basic task has not been done rigorously in the existing literature on support for state-level courts due to data limitations and limited interest by scholars. As will be described more fully in the following chapter, I have collected unique data that allow me to analyze these basic questions in a very rigorous manner. Moreover, I argue that these basic analyses add to our knowledge on support for the Ohio Supreme Court and, more importantly, make it possible subsequently to apply Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite discourse to support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and in doing so, to test the influence of political elites on support for the court.

The more sophisticated analyses required to test whether external elite messages function as a correlate of support argue for a conceptualization of support for courts that is based in part on citizens’ social and political environments—a conceptualization of support that I argue is more complex and realistic. Thus, although my first goal of...
describing and explaining levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court in many respects is separate from my goal of testing the influence of elite messages on support, the two objectives are related and complementary.

Although the basic multivariate analyses of the demographic and attitudinal correlates of support for the Ohio Supreme Court presented in the following chapter are important and arguably standard practice in contemporary political science, they are open to the charge of being atheoretical. After all, demographic variables by themselves typically are surrogates for some other, often more meaningful, characteristic or attitude. In this analysis, however, the demographic and attitudinal correlates of support for the Ohio Supreme Court are tied very directly into Zaller’s theoretical framework. As noted above, Zaller argues strongly that political messages have different effects in different sections of the public, depending on three factors: the intensity of the political message(s), citizens’ level of political awareness, and especially, citizens’ underlying predispositions (155-156).
It is the latter factor that gives demographic variables theoretical meaning in Zaller’s framework, in that citizens’ demographic characteristics (and to some extent, their attitudes on political issues) function as surrogates for the considerations that are central to his models of opinion formation and change. One implication of Zaller’s framework is that the considerations used by individuals are idiosyncratic to their opinion formation processes, and thus really are not amenable to systematic post-hoc analysis. However, I argue that the types of descriptive and multivariate analyses I propose as the first part of my dissertation provide an idea of what considerations generally influenced respondents-- as a group-- as they formulated opinions about support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

The second central aspect of my dissertation involves testing Zaller’s one-message and two message models using framing/priming experiments embedded in a CATI survey. I do so by taking advantage of a survey-based experiment that was included on the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic Survey as the Ohio Supreme Court was in the process of reconsidering whether Ohio’s system of funding public schools was constitutional. In the experiment, five measures of diffuse support and two measures of specific support were prefaced with one of six carefully-designed framing statements that made various value judgments about the new school funding plan proposed by the state legislature and about the Ohio Supreme Court’s original 1997 decision which found the school funding system to be unconstitutional. Brief descriptions of the six framing statements follow below. A seventh condition was a control group that consisted of a brief, non-reactive introduction to the support measures and which mentioned nothing about elite discourse or the funding plan.
Figure 3.2: Experimental Conditions used in July 2001 Buckeye State Poll

As noted above, I use the framing experiment to test Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite opinion leadership, and in doing so, to test whether elite messages influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Before describing my hypotheses, a very brief review of Zaller’s one message and two message models is necessary. As described in much greater detail above, Zaller’s one message model posits that if elite messages are unified around a mainstream/widely accepted position, public opinion should come to mirror that position, assuming the public has no deep-seated and accessible predispositions that run contrary to that position. In many instances, however, elites are divided and/or presenting two or more messages.

According to Zaller’s two message model, opinion formation in these situations should be characterized by public polarization along ideological lines, with members of the public resisting messages that are inconsistent with their underlying attitudinal and ideological predispositions. Finally, both of these effects will be most pronounced for
members of the public who are high in political awareness. Aside from the careful design of the framing statements, the other significant advantage of the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll was that it included measures of many different possible attitudinal and demographic predispositions that may influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Among the predispositions measured in the survey were party identification, ideology, agreement with the revised school funding plan, political knowledge, presence of children in respondents’ local public schools, and their view of the need for judicial and legislative separation of powers on the issue.

I use this design in chapter 5 to test five important hypotheses and theoretical expectations. First, if Zaller’s one-message model holds, we should expect that respondents who received the positive, non-ideological frame will express higher levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court than the control group. Any effects of this sort should be most pronounced for high-knowledge respondents. Similarly, to the extent that Zaller’s one-message model holds, we also should expect that respondents who received the positive, ideological frame should express higher levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court than the control group if their ideological predispositions are in the direction of the message. Again, any effects of this sort should be most pronounced for high-knowledge respondents.

Next, if Zaller’s one-message model holds, we should expect that respondents who received the negative, non-ideological frame will express lower levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court than the control group. As with the positive case, these effects should be most pronounced for high-knowledge respondents. Together with this, we also should expect that respondents who received the negative,
ideological frame should express lower levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court than the control group if their ideological predispositions are in the direction of the message. Once again political knowledge should play a role and we should see these effects most pronounced for high-knowledge respondents.

If Zaller’s two message model holds, we should expect that respondents will polarize along ideological lines, with respondents who are ideologically liberal expressing lower levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and respondents who are ideologically conservative expressing higher levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. These polarization effects will be more pronounced for respondents who received the explicitly ideological mixed frame than for those who received the mixed, non-ideological frame, and will be most pronounced for high-knowledge respondents in both conditions.

At this point, one important theoretical question has been left unanswered. Simply, Zaller has created a plausible and well-supported comprehensive model of opinion formation and change that has been tested successfully in multiple political domains. Does that leave any reason to expect that Zaller’s model will not hold when applied to the Ohio Supreme Court? That is, is there any reason to expect that opinion formation and change processes for support for courts would not operate in the ways that he hypothesized? At first, there may not seem to be any reason for the model not to hold, especially since it has been tested successfully in many other domains of public opinion and political science.
One answer to this question comes from political psychology. Many political psychologists would argue that Zaller’s model ignores much of contemporary psychology and thus does not provide an accurate explanation of the intra-individual processes that drive opinion formation and change processes generally, much less for courts. They characterize Zaller’s model as inherently memory-based in that it requires survey respondents to remember and integrate actual facts about the attitude object in question as they answer survey questions. Because much research in psychology has found that citizens have fallible memories (especially for political information), political psychologists argue that the opinion formation process and change process should be considered affective in nature. That is, when citizens encounter information about a political candidate or institution, they use that information to form an immediate affective judgment about the attitude object. That judgment then is integrated into an on-line, affective tally of emotions about the attitude object, and the actual information is forgotten (Lodge, McGraw, Stroh, 1989).

According to this model, when citizens are asked to voice an opinion about a political issue or candidate, they simply retrieve the on-line tally from long-term memory, look at the relative balance of positive and negative affective judgments stored in it, and then use that balance to form an opinion. Thus, this approach argues that Zaller’s theory and model will not hold for studying public support for courts because it relies on an overly optimistic assessment of citizens’ memory capabilities and thus cannot provide an accurate understanding of opinion formation and change, especially for a low-salience political institution like the Ohio Supreme Court.
However, there is another, more practical reason why Zaller’s model of elite-mass opinion linkages may not hold for the Ohio Supreme Court. As mentioned previously, the Ohio Supreme Court generally tends to be a low-salience institution, and the vast majority of its actions and policy outputs have little practical impact on the daily lives of the public. (See Zaller, 1992, p. 17 for a description of the extremely low public salience of the high-profile 1989 Webster v. Reproductive Services decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.) Although many reasons lead me to expect that Zaller’s model will hold when applied to the research question of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I suspect that some political institutions (potentially including the Ohio Supreme Court) may be so insignificant to the public that citizens can find themselves in situations where they have no established bank of considerations on the institution in question and as a result are systematically unable or unequipped to receive, process, or accept elite messages on the outputs of that institution as Zaller posits.

Phrased differently, Zaller would hold that elite discourse always has the potential to influence the opinion formation and change processes of the public, regardless of the context; in contrast, this argument holds that some institutions and attitude objects may be so non-salient to the public that elite discourse has no realistic or effective chance of influencing the public’s opinion formation and change processes on these objects. Simply, elite discourse may have no influence in specific low-salience contexts, and the very possibility of this is the reason why we can expect that Zaller’s model may not hold when applied to low-salience political institutions such as the Ohio Supreme Court.
This chapter has presented a new theoretical framework for understanding support for courts that is based on Zaller’s 1992 analysis of the nature and origins of public opinion. The chapter used that framework to develop a set of hypotheses and expectations that are designed to test the utility of Zaller’s theoretical framework for understanding support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In the next chapter, I will use Zaller’s framework and the hypotheses outlined above to describe and explain levels of public support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Subsequent chapters provide a much more detailed description of the survey-based experiment and report the results of an extensive number of analyses testing the applicability and explanatory power of Zaller’s one-message and two-message models of public opinion in the domain of support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
CHAPTER 4
IDENTIFYING LEVELS AND CORRELATES OF SUPPORT FOR THE OHIO SUPREME COURT

The literature review contained in the preceding chapters made it clear that although many scholars have studied support for courts, few have studied support for state and local courts. Moreover, many of the existing analyses of support for state and local courts are constrained by severe limitations in the data and in the conceptualization of support. This chapter presents new data that allows me to investigate the levels and correlates of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Although the following pages make it clear that I have struggled with many of the same issues and challenges that faced those before me, the analyses in this chapter build on and benefit from both the previous chapters and the existing scholarly work on this topic. In particular, the data and analyses presented in this chapter are constrained considerably by the scope of the datasets I used. However, the data are sufficiently broad to allow me to present a basic but meaningful description of levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court and to create a demographic profile of who among Ohio residents holds high levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
Data

Data for the following analyses come from the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll, a random-digit dial survey of Ohio residents that focused on measuring their perceptions of the economy. Although the primary focus of the survey was on the Ohio economy, this dataset is well-suited for my purposes because I was able to add four questions measuring diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and two questions measuring specific support for the court. The opportunity to add new items to the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll allowed me to develop rigorous new operationalizations of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court that mirror what Gibson and Caldeira (1992) used with great success at the national level to study support for the U.S. Supreme Court.

Figure 4.1 provides the questions used to measure diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. As noted above, I adapted my new measures of support from the questions that Caldeira and Gibson (1992) developed for their analyses of support for the U.S. Supreme Court. I did this because the items they created were carefully designed to measure the concepts of diffuse and specific support, respectively. Additionally, their research (along with the research of Segal 1995) demonstrated that the items had high levels of construct validity and internal reliability. I have measured diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court with a set of four items that asks respondents for their willingness to support fundamental changes in the powers, processes, and organizational structure of the Ohio Supreme Court. In keeping with the work of Caldeira and Gibson (1992), the questions deliberately offer respondents more than small changes to minor procedural and jurisdictional issues; this is consistent with my
conceptualization of diffuse support as opposition to basic structural and fundamental change to the court. Specific support was measured in my dataset with two items that asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with the Ohio Supreme court’s job performance, along with their attitudes toward the policies and decisions made by the Ohio Supreme Court. Random start programming included in the final questionnaire for the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll allowed me to control for question order effects by randomizing the order of the four diffuse support questions and the two specific support questions. Although the block of four diffuse support questions always preceded the block of two specific support questions, the orders of the items within each block were independently randomized.
Diffuse support: The power of the Ohio Supreme Court to declare acts of the Ohio legislature unconstitutional should be eliminated.

If the Ohio Supreme Court continually makes decisions that people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether.

It would not make much difference to me if the Ohio constitution were changed in order to reduce the powers of the Ohio Supreme Court.

The right of the Ohio Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Ohio state legislature.

Specific support: How would you rate the performance of the Ohio Supreme Court? Has it been doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?

Generally speaking, how satisfied have you been with the decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court during the past couple of years? Would you say extremely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or extremely dissatisfied?

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**Figure 4.1**
Operationalization of Diffuse and Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court

**Levels of Support**

I begin by illustrating in Table 4.1 the collapsed responses of my sample to my four new diffuse support questions. I collected the original responses to each of these items with a five-point agree-disagree Likert scale.

From these data, it would appear that diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court is substantial across three of the four measures presented here. Less than fifteen percent of the sample supported eliminating the court, even if it were to “continually make decisions that the people disagree with.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Percent Supportive of Proposal&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Percent Uncertain of Proposal</th>
<th>Percent Unsupportive of Proposal</th>
<th>Factor Loading&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The power of the Ohio Supreme Court to declare acts of the Ohio legislature unconstitutional should be eliminated.</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the Ohio Supreme Court continually makes decisions that people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether.</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would not make much difference to me if the Ohio constitution were changed in order to reduce the powers of the Ohio Supreme Court.</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right of the Ohio Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Ohio State legislature.</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>A total of 509 (unweighted) interviews were completed as part of the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll

<sup>b</sup>Loadings come from the first factor from the unrotated solution of a principal components factor analysis. All four items loaded onto one factor.

Table 4.1: Indicators of Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court

Only 17 percent of the sample supported eliminating the court’s power to declare acts of the Ohio legislature unconstitutional. Additionally, 63 percent of the sample opposed changing the Ohio constitution in order to reduce the powers of the Ohio Supreme Court. Only when respondents were presented with a clear separation of powers issue and asked whether, “the right of the Ohio Supreme Court to decide certain
types of controversial issues should be limited by the Ohio state legislature,” did diffuse support decline markedly—even then, a substantial minority (almost 39 percent of the sample) continued to support the court as an institution. Although the results from this latter measure are anomalous when compared to the data from the other three measures, they begin to make sense when put in the context of the court’s recent decisions on a number of controversial issues. These decisions, which focused on important public policy issues such as funding of public schools, the death penalty, and tort reform, (among others) can be expected to remain salient in respondents’ minds for an extended period, and likely had the effect of polarizing the public.

Table 4.1 also shows the factor loadings that result from a principal components factor analysis of the four items. The factor structure is unidimensional, with the first factor accounting for 44.6 percent of the variance in the items. The results of this factor analysis, along with the results of a reliability analysis performed below, allow me later to combine these four indicators of into a single additive index of diffuse support.

I measured specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court with two questions. The first asked respondents to rate whether the Ohio Supreme Court was doing “an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job.” The second asked respondents whether they had been “extremely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or extremely dissatisfied,” with the decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court over the past couple of years. Table 4.2 presents respondents’ patterns of answers to both of these questions.
How would you rate the overall performance of the Ohio Supreme Court?

- Excellent job: 4.5
- Good job: 46.2
- Fair job: 46.6
- Poor job: 2.6

High support: 50.7
Low support: 49.3

N = 446

How satisfied have you been with the decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court during the past couple of years?

- Extremely satisfied: 6.5
- Somewhat satisfied: 75.8
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 16.7
- Extremely dissatisfied: 1.0

High support: 82.3
Low support: 17.7

N = 438

Table 4.2: Indicators of Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court (in percentages)

Although majorities of the sample expressed high levels of specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, variability is apparent in the exact levels of specific support expressed across the two items. However, this is consistent with my theoretical expectations, in that measures of specific support should be less stable and consistent than the reservoir of diffuse support needed by the court to remain a viable political institution. Findings of high levels of specific and diffuse support also comport well with the “positivity bias” noted by Hoekstra (2000) and Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence (2003).
Support for the Ohio Supreme Court in Comparative Perspective

Because very little research has been done on the question of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, the data presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 do not allow me to compare them directly to any sort of “baseline” data on support for the Ohio Supreme Court in order to understand whether the levels of support shown in my data are high, low, or what we should expect. Answering that question requires a comparison of my data on support to data collected on support for another court. Because Caldeira and Gibson (1992) used very similar measures of diffuse and specific support in their research on the U.S. Supreme Court, I used their descriptive results as a benchmark of sorts for interpreting my data. Table 4.2 (below) is adapted from their 1992 article that reports data they collected as part of the 1987 General Social Survey.

The pattern evident in Caldeira and Gibson’s data on diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court generally mirrors what my data shows for the Ohio Supreme Court. When asked whether the power of the U.S. Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional should be eliminated, only 11.7 percent of Caldeira and Gibson’s black respondents and 9.4 percent of their white respondents supported this proposal. Similarly, Table 4.2 also demonstrates that the vast majority of both white and black respondents expressed support for the U.S. Supreme Court, even if it was continually making decisions that the public disagreed with. When asked whether respondents would support re-writing the U.S. Constitution in order to reduce the power of the Supreme Court, less than 20 percent of blacks and 10 percent of whites supported this proposal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Percent Supportive of Proposal</th>
<th>Percent Uncertain of Proposal</th>
<th>Percent Unsupportive of Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The power of the Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional should be eliminated.</td>
<td>Blacks 11.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites 9.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the Supreme Court continually makes decisions that people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether.</td>
<td>Blacks 14.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites 8.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would not make much difference to me if the U.S. Constitution were rewritten so as to reduce the powers of the Supreme Court.</td>
<td>Blacks 17.7</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites 9.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right of the U.S. Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the U.S. Congress.</td>
<td>Blacks 28.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites 28.3</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4.3: Indicators of Diffuse Support for the U.S. Supreme Court

As with the data presented on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, only when respondents were asked whether the power of the Supreme Court to decide controversial issues should be limited did less than 50 percent of both whites and blacks in the sample take a pro-court position. However, a higher proportion of the sample took a pro-Court position on this measure than with respondents in my sample of Ohio residents. Although it is beyond the scope of these data to investigate that question, I
suspect that the Ohio Supreme Court’s recent (and very controversial) series of decisions finding the state’s system of funding for public schools unconstitutional (and the political controversies those decisions have caused within the state government) made respondents in my study of the Ohio Supreme Court less likely to take a pro-court position in this area.

Caldeira and Gibson measured specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court by asking respondents whether the U.S. Supreme Court was too liberal, too conservative, or about right in its decisions. They found that 58 percent of their sample rated the Court’s decisions as “about right” (642). As described in Table 4.2, this level of specific support is higher than the results I reported for my measure of the overall performance of the Ohio Supreme Court, but also is substantially lower than the levels of support obtained when my respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court over the past couple of years. These differences could reflect actual differences in respondents’ levels of specific support for the two courts, but they are equally likely to be an artifact of differences in the operationalization of specific support used in the studies.
Although the comparison of specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court should be regarded as indeterminate, the comparison of diffuse support for the two courts presented in this section helps validate my new measures of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. After all, even though no other scholar has studied support for the Ohio Supreme Court in the manner I have, the results from my data are very similar to levels of support reported for the U.S. Supreme Court. That finding provides limited evidence that my new measures function as valid measures of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

**Correlates of Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court**

The literature review in chapter 2 illustrated that scholars have found both diffuse and specific support for courts to be related to a wide variety of political, attitudinal, and demographic factors. Because of this, I turned next to analyzing predictors of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

My first step was to create a dependent variable measuring diffuse support that incorporated the four diffuse support items on the questionnaire—essentially to create a single diffuse support “score” for each respondent in my dataset. Of course, before I was able to do so, I needed to verify that my four measures of diffuse support measured a single, unidimensional, set of attitudes toward the Ohio Supreme Court; and whether these items could be aggregated into a reliable measure of diffuse support. As noted above, I performed a principal components factor analysis to determine the number of factors. Table 4.1 (above) showed that all four items loaded strongly onto one factor, with that factor explaining 44.6 percent of the variance of the items.
I also tested the reliability of these items by calculating Cronbach’s Alpha. The analysis indicated that the items had an alpha value of .5731 and a standardized alpha value of .5763. Additionally, removing any of the four items would not have resulted in an appreciably higher alpha. Although an alpha value of .5731 is high enough to support combining these four items into a single measure of diffuse support, the alpha values are low in an absolute sense, and certainly much lower than Segal (1995) reported for her similar measures of diffuse support for the United States Supreme Court. I attribute the low alpha values in part to the low salience of the Ohio Supreme Court in respondents’ minds. Simply, many respondents have limited information and “soft” attitudes about the court. Because the Ohio Supreme Court generally is less salient than other political institutions such as the U.S. Congress or the U.S. Supreme Court, the reliability results are evidence that respondents have opinions on the court (and patterns of response to my support questions) that are less well structured than we would expect to see for more salient political institutions.

Based on these results, I then transformed my four measures of diffuse support into a single additive scale by summing the responses to each of the diffuse support items. One potential concern with measuring diffuse support in this manner for an attitude object that is not very salient in respondents’ minds is that there will be very little variation in the measure. Table 4.4 demonstrates that a lack of variation is not a problem for this data.
<table>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<td><strong>509</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 13.94  
Median = 14.00  
St. Dev = 2.58

Table 4.4: Frequencies, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Summed Diffuse Support Scores

Although the data display a tendency for respondents to have higher levels of diffuse support rather than lower levels, there clearly is significant variation in the levels of diffuse support that respondents had for the Ohio Supreme Court. This variable summing the diffuse support scores from each of the four diffuse support questions was used as the dependent variable in a multivariate model that tested the correlates of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
Much of the past work done by scholars such as Caldeira and Gibson (1992) and Segal (1995) has tested the impact of a variety of classes of variables—such as demographic correlates, political issues, political knowledge, and political efficacy—on support for the U.S. Supreme Court. I hoped to adopt a similar approach, and in doing so, to replicate many of the existing analyses of support for the U.S. Supreme Court using my data measuring support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Because my measures of support were included on an ongoing survey of economic matters in the state of Ohio, I was not able to add measures of values, political issue positions, political knowledge, or political efficacy—constructs that ideally I would have liked to include in my multivariate model. However, the instrument did contain an extensive set of demographic questions that I used in the following analyses as independent variables. These data limitations significantly constrain the scope of the analyses reported in this chapter and restrict me to creating a demographic profile of who among Ohio residents supports the Ohio Supreme Court. Even though the data force me to take a much narrower focus in this chapter than I would have liked, the analyses reported below remain a meaningful “first cut” at the correlates of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
I tested the influence of the following variables on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court:

- Gender (Female=0, Male=1)
- Age in years
- Race (Black=1, Other=0)
- Education (Not HS Grad =1, HS Grad, No College = 2, Some College = 3, College Grad =4)
- Household Income (< $20K = 1, $20K-$30K = 2, $30K-$50K = 3, $50K-$75K = 4, > $75K = 5)
- Liberal political orientation (No=0, Yes=1)
- Conservative political orientation (No=0, Yes=1)
- Region of residence (Rural=0, Urban=1)
- Presence of kids in the household (No kids=0, 1 or more kids=1)

Although these independent variables were included in order to help create a demographic profile of who in the Ohio public is most likely to express high levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, many of the variables have theoretical importance or are surrogates for other variables of significant theoretical importance. I included gender as a predictor of diffuse support because much research in political science has found that men and women approach political issues in very different ways. Because existing theories of support for courts and research on support for state-level courts do not address this question explicitly, I was unable to create theoretical expectations about the direction of any gender differences in support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Additionally, given that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down Ohio’s system of funding public schools after finding that the system did not provide adequate and equitable funding for a quality education (as will be described in greater detail in chapter 5), I hypothesized that respondents with school age children in their households would
express higher levels of support than others. Similarly, I included age and educational attainment as potential predictor variables because I hypothesized that older respondents and those with higher levels of education would think about support in different ways. I expected that age would be associated with higher levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, given that age has been found to produce socialization effects and positive affect toward political institutions. I did not have expectations about how education would influence support for the court. Moreover, Zaller argues strongly that opinion formation and change processes are quite different for respondents with high levels of political knowledge and those with low levels of knowledge; as will be noted below, newspaper readership functions as an imperfect surrogate of political knowledge.

I included race as a predictor of support because literature in political science and sociology has documented that blacks, in particular, have developed a deep distrust of courts and the criminal justice system, due to a perception that the system targets minorities unfairly. I thought it would be interesting to test whether these beliefs—as operationalized by the surrogate variable of race—could influence levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and I expected that African-Americans would express less support for the Ohio Supreme Court than respondents of other races.

Variables measuring respondents’ income, political ideology, and residence in an urban or rural setting were included because I hypothesized that these demographic characteristics would be significantly related to support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Specifically, I hypothesized that lower income groups would express higher levels of support for the court than higher income groups, due to the egalitarian nature of the court’s decision in the school funding case. I also expected that liberals and
conservatives would differ in their willingness to support the Ohio Supreme Court, but
the complex partisan nature of the school funding controversy meant that I had no clear
expectation about the direction of ideological effects. Finally, I expected that rural and
urban respondents would differ significantly in their awareness of the Ohio Supreme
Court and its decisions, and thus, would be likely to express significantly different levels
of support for the court as an institution; however, I was uncertain about how
respondents’ region of residence would influence support for the court.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.471**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.238)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have kids in household</td>
<td>-.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.271)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in Years</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.452)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.477***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.170*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberalism</td>
<td>.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.347)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
<td>-.536*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.292)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.243)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>11.98***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.541)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10  
** p < .05  
*** p < .01

$R^2 = .105$  
Adj. $R^2 = .089$  
N = 509

Table 4.5: Correlates of Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court (standard error in parentheses)
The set of independent variables listed above, as a group, were found to significantly predict respondents’ levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court (F = 6.439; df= 8; p < .001). Table 4.5 illustrates that gender, education, income, and political conservativism all were significant predictors of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. According to the partial, unstandardized coefficients (b), men expressed higher levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court than women. Moreover, respondents with the most education and those with higher incomes expressed greater support for the Ohio Supreme Court than less educated and less wealthy respondents. Additionally, respondents with a conservative political orientation generally expressed lower levels of diffuse support for the Court than those with liberal or moderate ideologies.

These results provide partial support for my hypotheses. My hypotheses that gender, education, income and political conservatism would emerge as significant predictors of diffuse support were confirmed. However, other hypotheses were not supported. I expected that income would have a negative relationship to support, but Table 4.4 shows that it operated in the opposite direction. Moreover, I expected that age, race, and region of the state (urban/rural) would be significant predictors of diffuse support. Given the substantial controversy over school funding in Ohio, I expected that having kids in the household would display a strong relationship to diffuse support. It, of course, did not have a significant relationship to diffuse support. Although all of my hypotheses were not confirmed, these initial results were encouraging and provided knowledge about how I could improve my subsequent models of support.
Diffuse Support, Specific Support, and Political Knowledge

In keeping with Zaller’s finding that opinion formation and change processes are different for high knowledge and low-knowledge respondents, my next step was to split my sample into two subsamples of high and low knowledge respondents and applied my model of diffuse support to both of the subsamples in order to determine if the correlates of diffuse support differed for high and low knowledge respondents. Unfortunately, the questionnaire for the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll did not include explicit measures of political knowledge. As a result, I had to use one of the measures that was included on the instrument as a surrogate for political knowledge. I drew on Zaller’s (1992) work in choosing the measure to use as my surrogate of political knowledge.

An appendix chapter in Zaller’s 1992 book highlights the fact that scholars have used a wide variety of operationalizations of political knowledge and political awareness in their work. Among these operationalizations have been level of political participation, level of political interest, level of media use, educational attainment, and neutral factual knowledge about politics (Zaller 333). Not surprisingly, he argued strongly that the best way to measure political knowledge was by including a battery of neutral factual questions that are closely related to the subject of interest, as these questions measure political learning that has actually occurred and political ideas that have been internalized (335). He also argued that measures of factual knowledge are preferable to other measures because they have an objectively “correct” answer and are less subject to social desirability biases and response effects (335).
The February 2002 Buckeye State Poll questionnaire included two possible measures of political knowledge—educational attainment and attention/exposure to print and broadcast media. Zaller found significant weaknesses with both as measures of political knowledge. In the case of education, he argued people who have developed abstract learning skills often also have internalized more political knowledge. However, he noted that educational attainment was only moderately correlated with political interest and neutral measures of political knowledge, leading him to conclude that, “many educated people, although having the cognitive skill necessary to develop political awareness, nonetheless lack the interest or motivation to keep abreast of political events” (334). This would seem to be a critical defect to education as a surrogate for political knowledge.

Zaller argued that although measures of media attention at first glance would seem to be excellent surrogates for political knowledge, these measures also had significant weaknesses as surrogates for political knowledge. Among the drawbacks was that measures of media exposure were subject to threats of social desirability, in that respondents frequently overstate their level of attention to specific print and broadcast media outlets; Zaller also argued that scholars must distinguish between “high-brow” media such as The Wall Street Journal and National Public Radio, and “low-brow” media such as local television and newspaper news, because in his view high-brow media outlets were more likely to provide respondents with political knowledge (334). Both of Zaller’s concerns are legitimate, but my data leave me no choice but to use media attention as a surrogate for political knowledge. In doing so, I acknowledge that (in keeping with Zaller’s argument) the primary measure of media attention in the February
2002 Buckeye State Poll suffers from a social desirability bias on the part of respondents. However, because I am measuring public support for a state-level political institution that is low in salience, I argue that Zaller’s distinction between low- and high-brow media outlets really does not apply in this context. Decisions and policy outputs by the Ohio Supreme Court—even highly controversial ones—stand little or no chance of being covered by the “high-brow” media. Instead, I argue that the Ohio Supreme Court is most likely to receive media coverage from precisely those media outlets—local television stations and local newspapers—that Zaller considers “low-brow.” In that sense, I do not regard Zaller’s concern about differences between high- and low-brow media outlets as a threat to my using media attention as a surrogate for political knowledge.

I argue that the social desirability bias in my media attention variables is less severe than the threats inherent with using educational attainment as a surrogate for political knowledge, and as a result, in the analyses that follow I have chosen to use media attention/exposure as my surrogate for political knowledge. I operationalized media attention as the number of days during the past week that a respondent read or looked at a daily newspaper. Table 4.6 demonstrates that although this variable has a significant number of respondents in each of its eight categories, the distribution displays a significant skew toward respondents reporting that they look at or read a daily newspaper seven days per week. This distribution reveals clear evidence of a social desirability bias on the part of respondents in my sample, as newspaper circulation data demonstrate that there is no realistic way that 43.3 percent of Ohio residents read or look at a daily newspaper every day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 4.35  
Standard Deviation = 2.78

Table 4.6: Frequencies, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Number of Days Respondent Read or Looked at A Daily Newspaper

Aside from the concerns about social desirability, I was concerned about other aspects of the variable. Certainly, the number of days a respondent read or looked at a daily newspaper is anything but a perfect measure of political knowledge. However, data limitations in this case provided no realistic alternatives, and I judged that the threats to using newspaper readership as a surrogate for political knowledge were less severe than the threats posed by the modest correlation between educational attainment and political knowledge. I am very cognizant of the need to measure political knowledge well, and the next chapter, which describes the experimental portion of my data, measures political knowledge using a more rigorous battery of five neutral factual knowledge items that were based on the work of DelliCarpini and Keeter (1993).
For the purposes of the analyses that follow, I considered respondents who indicated that they read or look at a daily newspaper seven days per week to be in the high knowledge category and respondents who read or look at a newspaper less than seven days per week to be in the low knowledge category. Although this operational choice is convenient in that it divides the sample fairly evenly into two large groups, my primary rationale for choosing seven days as my dividing point was that theoretically I felt that respondents who read or looked at a daily newspaper every day (and thus presumably had incorporated those activities into their normal daily routines) would be more likely to value the news and information provided by the newspaper, and consequently, would be more likely to display high levels of political information.

I begin by showing actual levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court for respondents in my high and low knowledge subsamples. I also compare the levels of diffuse and specific support expressed by respondents in each subgroup to the levels shown above for the full sample. Table 4.7 (below) presents data for my high and low knowledge subgroups on my measures of diffuse support.

Table 4.7 shows no clear differences between the levels of diffuse support expressed by high and low knowledge respondents in my sample. No consistent pattern emerged for respondents in the subgroup, with the exception that Table 4.6 shows a weak tendency of low knowledge respondents to be more likely than high knowledge respondents to report uncertainty about the proposals contained in each of my diffuse support items. Comparing the data in Table 4.7 to the data in Table 4.3 for my entire sample, no clear trends or differences emerged, demonstrating again that respondents in my sample—regardless of their levels of political awareness-- appeared to respond in
similar ways to my measures of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Of course, these results must be interpreted with caution, as my data relies on the use of suboptimal surrogate for political knowledge. A more rigorous measure of political knowledge may well present different results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Percent Supportive of Proposal</th>
<th>Percent Uncertain of Proposal</th>
<th>Percent Unsupportive of Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The power of the Ohio Supreme Court to declare acts of the Ohio legislature unconstitutional should be eliminated.</td>
<td>14.8 18.0</td>
<td>16.8 18.1</td>
<td>68.3 64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the Ohio Supreme Court continually makes decisions that people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether.</td>
<td>15.8 12.5</td>
<td>7.5 8.7</td>
<td>76.6 78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would not make much difference to me if the Ohio constitution were changed in order to reduce the powers of the Ohio Supreme Court.</td>
<td>23.3 18.8</td>
<td>17.5 16.5</td>
<td>59.2 64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right of the Ohio Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Ohio State legislature.</td>
<td>41.5 43.3</td>
<td>18.5 18.7</td>
<td>40.0 39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A total of 509 (unweighted) interviews were completed as part of the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll. 221 interviews fell into the high knowledge category, and 284 fell into the low knowledge category.

Table 4.7: Indicators of Diffuse Support for High and Low Knowledge Respondents
How would you rate the overall performance of the Ohio Supreme Court?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent job</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good job</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair job</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor job</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High support</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low support</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How satisfied have you been with the decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court during the past couple of years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High support</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low support</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Indicators of Specific Support for High and Low Knowledge Respondents (in percentages)

Table 4.8 presents the actual levels of specific support expressed by my high and low knowledge subgroups. When respondents were asked to rate the overall performance of the Ohio Supreme Court, low-knowledge respondents were less likely than high knowledge respondents and respondents in the full sample to express a high rating of the court’s performance. However, no other clear differences emerged—either between my subgroups or between my subgroups and the full sample, meaning that political
knowledge would not appear to capture the variance in specific support evident in my sample. As before, however, these findings must be interpreted with caution, due to my suboptimal measurement of political knowledge and to the relatively small sample sizes in each of the knowledge subsamples.

My next step was to test my model of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court for my high and low knowledge subgroups. As before, my dependent variable was respondents’ score on my additive Likert scale measure of diffuse support. I also used the same set of independent variables in these new models. As before, those independent variables included gender, age in years, race, education, household income, a dummy variable measuring whether respondents held a liberal political orientation, a dummy variable measuring whether respondents held a conservative political orientation, whether respondents lived in an urban or rural area, and the presence of kids in the household.

I began by testing the influence of these variables on the levels of diffuse support expressed by high knowledge respondents. The set of independent variables, as a group, were found to significantly predict high knowledge respondents’ levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court (F = 8.214; df= 10; p < .000). Table 4.9 illustrates that education, income, presence of kids in the household, and political conservativism all were significant predictors of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. According to the partial, unstandardized coefficients (b), among high-knowledge respondents, those with the most education and those with higher incomes expressed greater support for the Ohio Supreme Court than less educated and less wealthy respondents. As with the results for the full sample, respondents who did not have children in their households were more likely than other respondents to support the court. Finally, high-knowledge respondents
with a conservative political orientation once again generally expressed lower levels of diffuse support for the Court than those who held moderate or liberal political ideologies. These results demonstrate, somewhat surprisingly, that the model fits the data better for high knowledge respondents as a group than for all respondents.

I then tested the same model with the 257 respondents who constituted my low-knowledge subgroup. The set of independent variables, as a group, were found to significantly predict high knowledge respondents’ levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court ($F = 2.657; \text{df} = 9; p < .006$). Table 4.10 illustrates that for respondents in the low-knowledge group, education and age were significant predictors of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. According to the partial, unstandardized coefficients ($b$), among the low-knowledge subgroup, older respondents and those with higher levels of education were most likely to express diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

It should be recognized that the model for low-knowledge respondents fits the data least well of the three presented in this chapter, and collectively accounted for relatively little of the variation in diffuse support for low-knowledge respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>(standard error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>(.394)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of kids in household</td>
<td>-.208</td>
<td>(.495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in Years</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-1.294</td>
<td>(.799)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.486**</td>
<td>(.226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.310*</td>
<td>(.165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberalism</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td>(.570)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
<td>-1.134**</td>
<td>(.482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>.213</td>
<td>(.421)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>12.835***</td>
<td>(1.112)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10  
** p < .05  
*** p < .01

R² = .189  
Adj. R² = .149  
N = 221

Table 4.9: Correlates of Diffuse Support for High Knowledge Respondents (standard error in parentheses)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>(Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>(.296)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have kids in household</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td>(.316)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in Years</td>
<td>.023**</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.359</td>
<td>(.537)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.385**</td>
<td>(.159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>(.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberalism</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td>(.426)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>(.359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>(.297)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>11.593***</td>
<td>(.725)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

R² = .088
Adj. R² = .055
N = 257

Table 4.10: Correlates of Diffuse Support for Low Knowledge Respondents (standard error in parentheses)
Looking at the results of Tables 4.9 and 4.10 comparatively lends support to Zaller’s argument that low-knowledge respondents are different from high knowledge respondents. After all, the analyses revealed a somewhat different set of significant predictor variables for high-knowledge and low-knowledge respondents. For high knowledge respondents, political conservatism, education, presence of children in the household, and income emerged as significant predictors. However, for respondents in the low knowledge group, only age and education were significant correlates of support. Additionally, for both groups, the “common” significant predictor, education, had a positive sign, thus demonstrating a direct relationship between education and diffuse support—a result for education that would be predicted by Zaller’s framework.

One other aspect of my findings merits brief discussion. In looking at Tables 4.9 and 4.10 comparatively, it is clear that diffuse support has a higher degree of predictability for high knowledge respondents than for low-knowledge respondents. This finding comports well with Zaller’s framework, as he would argue that low-knowledge respondents have smaller and less organized banks of considerations that can result in less predictable expressions of support. This argument has substantial face validity. However, a second explanation that is unrelated to Zaller’s framework is possible as well. The tables demonstrate that with the exception of education, the correlates of diffuse support appear different for low-knowledge respondents than for high-knowledge respondents. As a result, the difference observed above in the predictability of diffuse support may be due to diffuse support being predicted by a different set of variables for high knowledge respondents than for low knowledge respondents. It is possible that the limited nature of my dataset meant that I was unable to include predictor variables that
would ameliorate the differences in predictability for low knowledge respondents. Unfortunately, this explanation cannot be tested with my current dataset—it simply is too limited to permit a more expansive model. Moreover, the caveat must be kept in mind that these analyses relied on a crude and somewhat unsatisfying measure of political knowledge. Being able to operationalize political knowledge using a series of neutral factual questions might have yielded substantially different results.

**Diffuse Support and Specific Support**

One possible explanatory variable—specific support for the Court—merits further explanation. Although Easton (1966) argued strongly that diffuse and specific support were theoretically distinct concepts, Segal (1995) found that specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court functioned as a strong predictor of diffuse support. More recently, Hoekstra (2000) found that respondents’ evaluations of specific decisions made by the Court influenced overall evaluations of the Court. Additionally, other research (Olson and Huth, 1998) on support for state and local courts has argued strongly that diffuse and specific support for state and local courts are not as theoretically distinct as Easton argued they were for the U.S. Supreme Court, thus providing further evidence that I should expect that specific support would display a significant relationship to diffuse support. Based on both of these arguments, I hypothesized that specific support would emerge as a significant predictor of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court and that specific and diffuse support would display a direct relationship in my multivariate analyses.
Because the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll included two questions measuring specific support, my first step was to combine them into a single composite “specific support” variable. I sought essentially to create a single specific support “score” for each respondent in my dataset. To do so, I first calculated the correlation between my two measures of specific support. I found that the two variables displayed a strong and highly significant correlation to one another (r=.698; p<.01).

This finding provided evidence that respondents thought about the overall job performance of the Ohio Supreme Court in the same way that they thought about their satisfaction with recent decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court. I used this data to compute a combined specific support variable that was operationalized simply as the average of the data from the two questions included on the questionnaire. I also recoded the variable so that low values on the scale represented low specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, while high values represented high specific support.

I sought next to test whether specific support functions as a predictor of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In order to do this, I revised my model of support by adding my specific support composite variable to the model used above and then re-estimated it for the 509 respondents in my sample. Table 4.11 (below) details the results of this new model.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Support</td>
<td>1.439***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.253)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.487*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of kids in household</td>
<td>-.528*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.289)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age in Years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.456)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.138)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.102)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political liberalism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.368)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.313)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td>.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.254)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>8.564***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.946)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10  
** p < .05  
*** p < .01  

R^2 = .219  
Adj. R^2 = .198  
N = 509

Table 4.11: Correlates of Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court (standard error in parentheses)
As can be seen from Table 4.11, the addition of specific support as an independent variable significantly improves the overall fit of the model and has some influence on the independent variables that emerge as significant predictors of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. All of the correlates that were significant in Table 4.5—gender, education, income, and political conservatism—remain significant when specific support is added to the model.

However, adding specific support does bring out two additional significant predictors of diffuse support. First, in keeping with Segal’s (1995) findings, specific support emerged as a highly significant predictor of diffuse support, meaning that respondents in my sample who supported the policy outputs and decisions of the Ohio Supreme Court also tended to support the Ohio Supreme Court as an institution. Because the items I included on the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll were not designed explicitly to explore the relationship between diffuse and specific support, I am unable to speak directly to questions of directionality or causality related to the relationship between diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. One other variable—the presence of kids in respondents’ households—also was a significant predictor of support, with respondents who had kids being less likely to express support for the court as an institution. The fact that this variable became significant once specific support was added to the model indicates that the presence of kids in the household interacts with specific support.
My next step was to test the model for my high and low knowledge subgroups. As before, I used newspaper readership as a surrogate variable to split my sample into high and low-knowledge groups. Table 4.12 contains the results of the revised model for the 221 respondents that constituted my high-knowledge subgroup.

For high knowledge respondents in my sample, specific support once again was a highly significant predictor of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Additionally, the model appears to fit the data quite well and explains a much higher amount of the variance in my dependent variable that my original model did. Comparing the results of Table 4.12 with the results of my original model in Table 4.9 demonstrates that the same variables that were significant in the original model (without specific support)—education, income, and political conservatism-- also were significant in the revised one above. In addition to specific support being a highly significant predictor of diffuse support, having kids in the household also was significant. As before, I speculate that this result provides evidence that specific support interacts with the variable measuring whether respondents have children in their households.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Age in Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>(.229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>(.163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberalism</td>
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<td>(.594)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
<td>-1.296**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>7.485***</td>
<td>(1.503)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

R² = .347
Adj. R² = .304
N = 221

Table 4.12: Correlates of Diffuse Support for High Knowledge Respondents (standard error in parentheses)
For high knowledge respondents in my sample, specific support once again was a highly significant predictor of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Additionally, the model appears to fit the data quite well and explains a much higher amount of the variance in my dependent variable that my original model did. Comparing the results of Table 4.12 with the results of my original model in Table 4.9 demonstrates that the same variables that were significant in the original model (without specific support)—education, income, and political conservatism-- also were significant in the revised one above. In addition to specific support being a highly significant predictor of diffuse support, having kids in the household also was significant. As before, I speculate that this result provides evidence that specific support interacts with the variable measuring whether respondents have children in their households.

Table 4.13 shows the results of the same model for the 257 respondents in my low-knowledge subgroup.
Table 4.13: Correlates of Diffuse Support for Low Knowledge Respondents (standard error in parentheses)
As with the revised model for the full sample and for my high knowledge subsample, the addition of specific support to the model for my low knowledge subgroup significantly improves the fit of my model to the data. Table 4.13 demonstrates that for low-knowledge respondents, those who were male, more highly educated, and those who were politically liberal were most likely to express support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Comparing these findings to the results for low-knowledge respondents in my original model (as reported in Table 4.9) demonstrates that including specific support as a predictor in the model substantially changes the predictor variables that emerge as significant. Educational attainment was the only predictor variable that was significant in both of the models, thus providing evidence that for low-knowledge respondents, specific support would appear to interact with many of the other predictor variables included in the model.

It also is worth noting that even with the addition of specific support to the model, the model still predicted diffuse support less well for low-knowledge respondents than for high knowledge respondents. Moreover, looking at Tables 4.12 and 4.13 comparatively shows that the relationship between diffuse and specific support is stronger for high-knowledge respondents than for low-knowledge respondents. These are curious (and important) findings that merit further investigation.
Conclusion

One of the primary purposes of this dissertation is to describe overall levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court and to probe the demographic correlates of those levels of support. This chapter has done just that, using new data and measures adapted from Caldeira and Gibson’s previous work focused on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that when Ohioans were asked whether they support the Ohio Supreme Court as part of a survey interview, significant numbers of Ohio residents expressed high levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Additionally, I examined the demographic correlates of diffuse support and found that high-knowledge and low knowledge supporters of the Ohio Supreme Court had somewhat different demographic characteristics, a result that is consistent with Zaller’s argument that political knowledge conditions opinion formation and change processes.
Of the models I presented in this chapter, the model for high knowledge respondents consistently fit the data best, while the model for low knowledge respondents consistently fit the data much less well—explaining only five percent of the variance in the model that did not include specific support as a predictor, and less than 12 percent in the model that did. This is a curious result that leads me to speculate either that other types of variables—such as political values—not included on the very limited scope of my survey instrument play a strong role in explaining support for low knowledge respondents or that judgments of support expressed by low knowledge respondents are simply not structured well enough to be captured well by an empirical model. It is beyond the scope of this study and my data to answer that question definitively, but the finding remains one of the more interesting to emerge from this limited and preliminary investigation.

Although the study reported in this chapter was successful in reporting levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court and in probing the correlates of diffuse support for the court, the nature of the data I used make this a limited and preliminary investigation of these questions. Because of this, my conclusions require two caveats. I ideally would have liked to include a much wider variety of possible correlates in my models of diffuse and specific support—especially issue positions and political values. The limitation I encountered with this dataset mirrored data-related difficulties encountered by previous scholars studying support for state and local courts. Additionally, I have acknowledged that my measurement of political knowledge is sub-optimal and falls far short of the “neutral factual” standard advocated by Zaller for measuring political knowledge in an objective manner.
Despite these difficulties, the chapter effectively provides a rough, first-cut understanding of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. The next chapter draws on the analyses presented in this chapter to construct a more complete (and theoretically interesting) model of diffuse support. More importantly, the study presented in the next chapter uses a carefully-designed and unique survey-based experiment to test whether levels of diffuse and specific support can be influenced by elite discourse. To that end, the experiment also provides a real-world test of Zaller’s one-message and two-message models of elite-mass linkage described previously.
CHAPTER 5

ELITE MESSAGES AND SUPPORT FOR THE OHIO SUPREME COURT: EVIDENCE FROM A NEW SURVEY-BASED EXPERIMENT

The previous chapter contained basic analyses that described and explained the levels and correlates of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In doing so, it became clear that many of the data and theoretical limitations of previous studies also constrained the analyses presented in the chapter. Not the least of the limitations was that the analyses presented in the previous chapter assumed implicitly that judgments of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court were fixed attitudes which could be reported accurately to a telephone interviewer.

This assumption is problematic in Zaller’s theoretical framework because judgments of support for a court or other political institution are made in a dynamic social environment that often is characterized by discourse between everyday citizens and political elites. Although it is far beyond the scope of this research to include the entirety of these social influences in a single model of support, this chapter reports data from a unique survey-based experiment that was designed to measure the influence of elite discourse—one such external social influence—on support for the Ohio Supreme Court. I used a survey-based experiment to test whether elite messages can influence diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and to test whether Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite communication (along with his mainstream and polarization effects) accurately characterize support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
Although most other published studies of support for courts have focused on identifying a broad range of demographic and attitudinal correlates of support, my emphasis in this chapter is primarily on the association between elite messages and diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Because the results from these analyses do not conform to my theoretical expectations, I conclude the chapter with a detailed discussion of my anomalous findings, along with a review of a number of diagnostic analyses I used to rule out potential explanations for the findings.

Aside from helping to ensure that my subject population contains a diverse mixture of Ohio residents (not just the college sophomores used in many laboratory experiments), my use of a survey-based experiment provides two other significant advantages. First, random assignment to conditions, carefully designed treatment conditions, and the presence of a control group help create a controlled environment that allows me to determine the relationship between elite messages and support for the Ohio Supreme Court in a more direct manner than otherwise would have been possible. More importantly, such an environment also helps to control for potentially confounding variables, and in turn increases the confidence that I (or anyone else, for that matter) can place in the results of the analyses presented in this chapter.

Research Expectations

As noted above, this chapter focuses on whether elite messages can influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and in particular, whether Zaller’s one-message and two message models of elite-mass communication apply to opinion formation and change processes about the Ohio Supreme Court. Several expectations guided the analyses that follow.
Most fundamental was my expectation—in keeping with Zaller’s theory—that elite messages could influence the levels of support expressed by the public for the Ohio Supreme Court. Zaller’s 1992 analysis validates his one-message and two-message models in a variety of similar domains, including the 1991-1992 Gulf War. Additionally, several studies have shown that most Americans know very little about how the U.S. Supreme Court operates and about its role in the federal political system (Kessel 1966, Murphy and Tanenhaus 1968; but see Hoekstra 2000 for a counterpoint). State level courts usually have even lower levels of salience, meaning that we should expect that the public has less knowledge about the Ohio Supreme Court and how it does its job than they do about the U.S. Supreme Court. Zaller’s framework led me to expect that the public would have relatively few considerations about the Ohio Supreme Court, and that they would have considerations about the court that are only partially consistent with one another. Assuming that attitudes about the Ohio Supreme Court—including support for it—can be based on a wide variety of factors, including messages from political elites, is consistent with Zaller’s framework.

One significant concern about this expectation is that Ohioans may be so uninformed about the Ohio Supreme Court that their opinions about the court are random and thus approach what Converse termed “nonattitudes” (Converse 1964). If this were to be the case, any relationship between elite messages and support for the Ohio Supreme Court would be spurious and due to the randomness in respondents’ answers. While this may be possible, I argue that it is highly unlikely due to the level of media coverage of the Court at the time the survey was fielded. As noted previously, my experimental study occurred at a time when the Ohio Supreme Court was in the process of deciding whether
Ohio system of funding public schools was constitutional. The nature of this case (DeRolph v. State of Ohio, 2001) gave the Ohio Supreme Court unprecedented visibility and made it the subject of almost daily coverage by print and broadcast media in Ohio. Moreover, Hoekstra (2000) found that citizens did pay attention to high-profile decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court. These previous findings and the nature of the DeRolph cases (DeRolph v. State 1997, 2000, 2001) lead to me conclude that for the purposes of the study presented in this chapter, a potential lack of information about the court and its actions in the school funding controversy should not be a problem.

Although the high level of media attention to the Court during the survey period helped to ensure that most respondents had enough knowledge of and information about the Court in order to form a genuine judgment of support, it remains very likely that some respondents nonetheless began the survey interview with very poorly formed attitudes about the Ohio Supreme Court and with small, disorganized banks of considerations about the Ohio Supreme Court. Because some (unquantifiable) minority of respondents likely did not come into my survey with well-formed attitudes about the court, the “elite messages” I prefaced my measures of support with constitute a most likely cases scenario for the influence of elite messages on support for the Ohio Supreme Court. That is, I expect that some respondents based their judgments of support for the court almost entirely on the information provided by my manipulation. As a result, if ever there was a context in which I would expect a manipulation of this sort to be a significant influence on respondents’ opinions, this is it.
I also expected that the nature of the elite message or messages presented to respondents could condition the influence of elite messages on support. I have noted that Zaller’s theoretical framework led me to expect that elite messages could influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court. However, I do not expect that influence to be uniform across all types of elite messages and in all environments. Zaller argues strongly that all elite messages are not created equal and notes that the intensity and valence of the message presented to respondents will interact with respondents’ considerations to produce any effects that are observed. My study was designed carefully to control for message intensity and to manipulate the valence of the information presented to respondents. As noted previously, respondents were randomly assigned to one of seven conditions. Figure 5.1 provides summary information about these conditions.

The conditions lead me to have three additional expectations about interactions between message effects and support for the Court. First, in cases where respondents were exposed to a single, non-ideological elite message, I expect that their opinions will come to mirror that elite position, with respondents who received the positive statement being more likely to express support for the court than the control group, and respondents who received the negative statement being less likely to support the court than the control group.
1) elites unified in non-ideological manner, with positive frame of plan
2) elites unified in non-ideological manner, with negative frame of plan
3) elites unified in ideological manner, with positive (Republican) frame of plan
4) elites unified in ideological manner, with negative (Democratic) frame of plan
5) elites divided—frame providing both good and bad information about plan
6) elites divided—frame providing both good (Republican) and bad (Democratic) information about plan
7) a non-reactive control condition, in which the wording was designed carefully not to interact with my measures of support for the Ohio Supreme Court

Figure 5.1: Treatment Conditions in July 2001 Buckeye State Poll

Next, in cases where respondents were exposed to a single ideological elite message, I expect that respondents will come to mirror that elite position, unless the respondent has strong predispositions that run counter to the direction of that message. Thus, I expect that liberal respondents who received the liberal, negative message about the Ohio Supreme Court should express lower levels of support for the court than conservative respondents who received the same message and than the control group. Respondents who received a conservative, positive message about the court should be more likely to support the court than liberal respondents who received the same message and the control group.

However, in cases where respondents receive two competing messages from political elites, I expect—in accordance with Zaller’s theory-- that the public will polarize. As described in chapter 3, this polarization should occur along ideological lines, with respondents rejecting the message that is most opposite of their ideological position. Thus, I expect that liberal respondents who received either of the two message conditions will reject the positive (conservative) message, accept the negative (liberal) one, and be less likely to support the court than conservative respondents who received
the same message. Similarly, I expect that conservative respondents in these conditions will reject the negative message, accept the positive one, and express more support for the court than liberal respondents.

Finally, in keeping with Zaller’s framework, I expected that political knowledge would interact with the effects of elite messages, and thus, that the influence of elite messages on support for the Ohio Supreme Court would vary across individuals in my population. Zaller argued that respondents with moderate levels of political knowledge would be more likely to be influenced by elite messages than respondents with low or high levels of political knowledge. This follows from his argument that any real world influence of elite messages depends on two processes—the respondent has first to receive the message and then has to accept the message and integrate it with their existing considerations. By virtue of their limited attention to politics and their inconsistent and/or poorly organized banks of considerations, low-knowledge respondents are less likely than high-knowledge respondents to receive or be able to process messages from political elites. At the same time, however, high knowledge respondents have well-developed and well-organized banks of considerations that allow them to reject messages that are inconsistent with their existing predispositions.

However, the design of my study means that the argument noted above may not hold, and that any effects of this type may operate in the opposite direction. Zaller posits that these processes operate in real-world contexts and that it is real world events that function as the “frames” for mass opinion. One major limitation of my experiment is that it is unable to match the realism of real world events—especially given the complex nature of the school funding issue in Ohio and of the court’s decisions on the issue.
Moreover, my study holds the receipt process constant, as respondents in all six of the treatment conditions received an elite message, regardless of their prior knowledge about politics or about the Ohio Supreme Court. As a result, the receipt process, which works in Zaller’s framework to make the impact of elite messages larger for medium-knowledge respondents, essentially disappeared in my study.

My research design makes the impact of elite messages on support for the Ohio Supreme Court depend only on their acceptance of the messages I provided to respondents. I hypothesized that this design would depress the influence of elite messages on my high knowledge respondents, as high knowledge respondents have larger and better organized banks of considerations that allow them to reject messages that are inconsistent with their predispositions. Because my study gave greater weight to the processes that are likely to make the impact of elite messages larger for moderate and low-knowledge respondents, I expected (contrary to Zaller’s argument) that high knowledge respondents would be less likely than low knowledge respondents to show influence from elite messages—regardless of the treatment condition the respondent was randomly assigned to.
Data and Methods

Data for the analyses presented in this chapter were obtained from the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic Survey. The July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic Survey was a survey of Ohio residents sponsored by the Columbus Dispatch and Ohio State’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The questionnaire focused on issues related to the state government in Ohio and contained an extensive set of demographic and background questions. Appendix A contains more detailed information about the survey methodology, including information about response rates for the survey.

The July 2001 Special Topic survey was conducted as the Ohio Supreme Court was in the process of reconsidering whether Ohio’s system of funding public schools was constitutional. As described more fully in chapter 2, this case began with a 1991 lawsuit that challenged Ohio’s system of funding public schools on the grounds that it did not fulfill its constitutional duty to provide a “…thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state” (Ohio Constitution Article VI, section 2). In 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court, hearing the case on appeal, ruled that the state’s system for funding public education was unconstitutional and gave the state legislature one year to develop a new funding system.

The state made minor changes to the school funding system and increased the amount of state aid available to school districts for building and renovation programs. Political considerations prevented a more systematic overhaul of the system. The case then returned to the Court of Common Pleas for them to evaluate the state’s response. After a series of appeals of the ruling by the judge, the case again reached the Ohio Supreme Court (DeRolph v. State, 1999). In May of 2000 the Ohio Supreme Court
reviewed the revised plan and ruled that the state’s school funding system remained unconstitutional. As before, the court reserved jurisdiction on the case and gave the state one year to comprehensively revise the school funding plan and resubmit it to the court for review.

Because it was an election year and state legislators feared that they would need to raise taxes to comply with the state’s ruling, the state legislature took no action on revising the school funding system until after the November 2000 election. During the next six months, the state legislature worked feverishly to develop a plan that would comply with the court’s ruling but which would not require a statewide tax increase. The July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic survey began on July 7, 2001, during the Ohio Supreme Court’s deliberations on the constitutionality of the new funding plan. Uncertainty related to how the Court would rule made the field period of the survey a time in which interest in how the court would rule was high. More importantly, political elites on both sides of the issue were very vocal about the impact of a variety of potential decisions the court could make. The school funding issue also received extensive media attention by print and broadcast media throughout the state of Ohio, and the Court’s past actions and likely decision were the subject of multiple newspaper editorials.

It is in this context of controversy that the following analyses look at the question of elite messages as a source of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. To take advantage of this unique natural experiment, the July 2001 Special Topic questionnaire incorporated a survey-based experiment that prefaced the four measures of support with one of six framing statements that made various value judgments about the new school funding plan proposed by the state legislature and which referenced the original 1997 Ohio Supreme
Court decision finding the school funding system unconstitutional. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of seven conditions—to one of the six treatment conditions, or to a control group that received only a general introduction to the support measures and no evaluative judgment of the new funding plan. Appendix C contains the exact wording of each of the six treatment conditions, along with the wording of the control condition. These framing statements prefaced the same four diffuse support measures and the same measures of specific support used in the data reported in chapter 4. As before, respondents received one of the seven introductions to the support questions, then the block of diffuse support measures, followed by the specific support questions. Although the order of the blocks of questions did not change (i.e., respondents always got the questions measuring their diffuse support for the court before the questions measuring specific support), the order of the questions within each block of items was randomized.

As noted in chapter 3, Zaller posits that the impact of elites is conditioned based on a two step process—first, receiving a message and then acceptance of the message if it is consistent with considerations on the issue. As discussed above, the design of this study assumes that respondents will receive the messages and in a sense, holds that constant by delivering an elite message to respondents in all 6 treatment conditions. For that reason, this chapter only is able to analyze the influence of citizens’ acceptance of elite messages on support for the court.

**Elite Messages and Support for the Ohio Supreme Court**

As noted above, my first objective was to determine whether elite messages, as operationalized in my framing statements, could influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court. As in chapter 4, I began by creating a dependent variable measuring diffuse
support that incorporated the four support items on the questionnaire—a variable which essentially created a single institutional support “score” for each respondent in my dataset. As before, I needed to verify that my four measures of support measured a single, unidimensional, set of attitudes toward the Ohio Supreme Court; and whether these items formed a reliable measure of support. I performed a principal components factor analysis to determine the number of factors. Table 5.1 (below) demonstrates that the four items loaded onto one factor, with that factor explaining 44.4 percent of the variance of the items.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The power of the Ohio Supreme Court to declare acts of the Ohio legislature unconstitutional should be eliminated. (mc5)</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the Ohio Supreme Court continually makes decisions that people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether. (mc6)</td>
<td>.527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would not make much difference to me if the Ohio constitution were changed in order to reduce the powers of the Ohio Supreme Court. (mc7)</td>
<td>.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right of the Ohio Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Ohio State legislature. (mc8)</td>
<td>.360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Indicators of Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court
The reliability of these items also was tested, resulting in an alpha value of .5777 and a standardized alpha value of .5769. However, the valence of question MC7 required me to reverse code it for the items to display a respectable alpha value. Before I recoded question MC7, the alpha value for my four measures was .1823—an extremely low coefficient of reliability that did not support the construction of an additive scale. The need to reverse code MC7 and the low alpha value that resulted from the original coding of the variable supported dropping question MC7 from the scale. Furthermore, my reliability analysis demonstrated that removing the MC7 item from the scale would result in a scale that had an alpha value of .5638—an alpha value that, while slightly lower than the .5777 alpha above, supported the creation of a three-item additive measure of support. As with my first study, I then transformed my three measures of support into a single additive scale by summing the responses to each of the four support items. This created a new variable, called DS3, that included data from three of my four measures of diffuse support and which was used as the dependent variable in a multivariate model that tested whether elite messages influenced support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Table 5.2 presents the distribution of this new variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<td>8.00</td>
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<td>9.00</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>92.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 9.85  
Median = 10.00  
St. Dev = 2.89

Table 5.2: Frequencies, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Summed Diffuse Support Scores
As described previously, respondents in the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic Survey were randomly assigned to one of seven conditions—six treatment conditions and a control condition. Each of the treatment conditions prefaced my measures of support with a framing statement that presented respondents with information about the school funding controversy. Appendix C contains the exact wording of the statement used in each condition; however it is important to note that each of the statements focused on both the Ohio Supreme Court and Ohio’s state legislature. My experiment systematically manipulates the valence and partisan orientation of each statement; nevertheless, the statements were very similar in the information they conveyed to respondents. Each statement had a substantial legislative focus, told respondents that the court had struck down the legislature’s funding system, and told them that the legislature had developed a new plan to respond to the court’s ruling. The legislative focus of my framing statements will be discussed in greater detail below; however, this fact should be kept in mind as the findings of my analyses are presented in the following tables.

In order to test whether elite messages—as operationalized in my framing statements—could influence diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I created a very simple multivariate regression model that used my additive diffuse support index as the dependent variable and dummy variables for each of the six treatment conditions as predictors. Table 5.3 (below) shows the results of this model for my full sample.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>9.497</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: general, positive frame</td>
<td>.951</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: general, negative frame</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: non-ideological 2 message positive/negative frame</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Republican, positive frame</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>.682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Democratic, negative frame</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: 2 message, mixed Republican/Democratic frame</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.381</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=793
R^2=.010
Adj R^2=.002

Table 5.3: Regression for full sample

The partial, unstandardized coefficients (b) displayed in Table 5.3 demonstrate that only one of the six treatment conditions was a significant predictor of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In this model, respondents who were randomly assigned to the condition in which the legislature’s new funding plan was framed as positive expressed more support for the Ohio Supreme Court than the control group. This finding provides limited evidence that the elite messages operationalized in my framing statements can influence public support for the Ohio Supreme Court. As noted above, one of my expectations was that the opinions of respondents who were randomly assigned to a single, non-ideological message condition would be characterized by Zaller’s mainstream effect. That is, respondents who received the non-ideological positive message should
exhibit more support for the court than the control group, and respondents who received the non-ideological negative message should exhibit less support for the court than the control group. The results displayed in Table 3 confirm these expectations in part, as respondents who were randomly assigned to the non-ideological positive condition did express higher levels of support for the court. However, the other half of this expectation was not confirmed, as the dummy variable for the general, negative condition was not significant and, in fact, had a positive sign.

In keeping with Zaller’s (1992) argument that political knowledge conditions opinion formation and change processes, my next step was to divide my sample into three knowledge subgroups and estimate the same model for each subsample. The questionnaire used in the July 2001 Special Topic survey included four “objective” measures of political knowledge that were focused on measuring respondents’ knowledge about issues related to Ohio government and politics (see Appendix C for the exact wording of these items). Unlike the unsatisfactory surrogate variables used in chapter 4 to measure political knowledge, the presence of these items on the questionnaire allowed me to measure political knowledge in a rigorous manner that was in accordance with Zaller’s (1992) recommendations. I used the data from these four questions to compute a summary measure of political knowledge that was simply an additive measure that counted each respondent’s number of correct responses to the political knowledge items. The resulting variable ranged from zero to four and Table 5.4 displays the distribution and measures of central tendency for this new political knowledge scale.
Table 5.4 demonstrates that respondents’ knowledge about the Ohio Supreme Court and other aspects of state government in Ohio was very low, with only 39.4 percent of the sample answering more than one of the four questions correctly. Based on the distribution of the variable and its measures of central tendency, I considered anyone who answered two or more of the four knowledge questions correctly to be in my high knowledge category, one in the medium knowledge category, and zero in the low-knowledge category. This grouping meant that my high knowledge category contained 313 respondents, my medium knowledge category contained 296 respondents, and my low-knowledge category contained 184 respondents.

Although the nature of these groupings could be considered arbitrary in some respects, the grouping was done with care to be faithful to Zaller’s intentions related to political knowledge. Additionally, the design of my study makes using a high, medium, and low categorization scheme a bit strange, since the study frames themselves provide respondents with some information about Ohio government and politics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 1.31  
Median = 1.00  
Mode = 1.00

Table 5.4: Frequencies and Measures of Central Tendency for Political Knowledge Scale

In that sense, one could make the argument that respondents should be grouped into two categories—high and medium knowledge, not the three category, high-medium-low scheme I have used here. However, the frames do not provide information that can be used to answer the knowledge questions, and the significant proportion of respondents who answered none of the four questions correctly provides support for the three category knowledge split I have used in this chapter. Additionally, Zaller’s (1992) framework argues strongly that the effects of elite messages will be most visible for respondents who are in the medium knowledge category, and dividing my sample into three knowledge categories allows me to investigate that aspect of his argument.

I began my analysis by testing the same multivariate model of support used above for each of these three knowledge subgroups. Table 5.5 displays the results for the 313 respondents in my high knowledge subgroup.
### Table 5.5: Regression for High Knowledge Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>10.504</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: general, positive frame</td>
<td>.525</td>
<td>.622</td>
<td>.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: general, negative frame</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: non-ideological 2 message</td>
<td>-.572</td>
<td>.637</td>
<td>.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive/negative frame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Republican, positive frame</td>
<td>-.102</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Democratic, negative frame</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>.914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: 2 message, mixed Republican/Democratic frame</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>.682</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=313  
R²=.011  
Adj R²= -.008

Table 5.5 shows that none of the framing statements had a significant influence on levels of diffuse support expressed by high-knowledge respondents for the Ohio Supreme Court. These results are consistent with my theoretical expectations and with Zaller’s argument that high-knowledge respondents are well-equipped to receive elite messages, but also are especially capable of rejecting elite messages that are inconsistent with their existing predispositions.
I then tested this model for the 296 respondents who constituted my medium knowledge group. Table 5.6 displays the results for this subgroup. The findings displayed above show that five of my six framing statements appeared to be significant predictors of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Respondents who were randomly assigned to both my positive general frame and to my positive ideological frame expressed higher levels of support for the court than the control group—results that are in accordance with my theoretical expectations and Zaller’s predictions.

However, the rest of the results displayed in Table 5.6 are more puzzling. Respondents who were randomly assigned to either of the negative frames in which the new funding plan by the legislature was framed as having a negative impact on public
schools in Ohio also were more likely to be supportive of the Ohio Supreme Court as an institution—a result that is directly opposite of my expectations. Finally, respondents in the medium knowledge group who received the ideological two message frame also expressed more support for the court than the control group. I investigated this puzzling result further by testing the model on just the 136 Republicans in the medium knowledge group and on the 82 Democratic respondents in the medium knowledge group. My hope was that respondents’ party identification would mediate how they reacted to the ideological two-message condition that was significant in the larger model. Unfortunately, none of the frames were significant in these additional models, a result likely due in part to small numbers of respondents in each of my treatment cells. These puzzling, uniformly positive coefficients will be discussed further below.

Finally, I tested the model with the 184 respondents who fell into my low-knowledge subgroup. Consistent with Zaller’s argument, I expected that respondents in this subgroup would be ill-equipped to receive and process elite messages about support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Table 5.7 demonstrates that none of my framing statements were significant predictors of support for respondents in my low-knowledge subgroup.

At this point, it is useful to review the results of the four models presented thus far in the chapter. For the full sample, elite messages seemed to be a significant positive influence on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court for respondents who were randomly assigned to receive the non-ideological elite message that presented respondents with a positive message about the legislature’s new funding plan. Aside from this, however, the results for the full sample provided little support for Zaller’s model or for the theoretical expectations I outlined in the beginning of this chapter.
The results of the models for the knowledge subgroups in many respects are more interesting and in some respects are more puzzling. I found that elite messages, as operationalized in my framing statements, appeared to have no influence on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court for respondents in my high and low-knowledge subgroups. These findings comport well with my theoretical expectations and with Zaller’s framework and can be explained by the differential characteristics of these groups as they relate to each group’s ability to process and accept elite messages. According to Zaller, respondents in the low-knowledge subgroup have low levels of political awareness, and poorly formed and organized banks of considerations that make them generally unable to receive or process messages from elites. In contrast, high-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>9.259</td>
<td>.698</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: general, positive frame</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: general, negative frame</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td>.882</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: non-ideological 2 message positive/negative frame</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Republican, positive frame</td>
<td>-.719</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Democratic, negative frame</td>
<td>-.714</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: 2 message, mixed Republican/Democratic frame</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>.729</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=184
R²=.039
Adj R²=.006

Table 5.7: Regression for Low-knowledge Respondents
knowledge respondents are well-equipped to receive elite messages, but their well-developed and well-organized banks of considerations allow them to resist messages that are inconsistent with their existing predispositions on a political issue.

Zaller argues that respondents who have moderate levels of political knowledge are most likely to be influenced by elite messages. After all, respondents in this category have sufficient awareness to receive and process elite messages, but their banks of considerations are not so well-organized or well-developed that they are as able as high-knowledge respondents to resist messages that are inconsistent with their established predispositions. The results in Table 5.6 appear to confirm this aspect of Zaller’s argument, in that elite messages were significant predictors of diffuse support in five of the six treatment conditions. However, the coefficients were uniformly positive—a result that makes little theoretical or practical sense. My next question was how to explain the curious results and the uniformly positive signs. In order to investigate the strange results, I ran a series of diagnostic analyses to test two hypotheses I had about the results.

Even though the CATI program used for the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll was programmed to randomly assign respondents to one of my seven conditions, the program was not able to ensure that the precise demographic mixture of respondents assigned to each treatment was representative of all Ohio residents. That is, I hypothesized that one explanation for the unusual results above was that the respondents who received each condition may have been skewed on one or more of the demographic variables of interest. Demographic variables often function as surrogates for respondents’ attitudes and a skew on one or more demographic variables for a subgroup could mean that respondents who were assigned to the condition had “unusual” attitudes and thus, that
they responded to my manipulations in unusual ways. To test this possible explanation for my results, I ran a series of seven logistic regressions—one for each of my conditions. I used a dummy variable that captured membership in each condition as the dependent variable in each of the equations, and gender, education, ideology, and party identification were my predictor variables, as they are the demographic characteristics that are most central to my research and to Zaller’s theory. Gender displayed a significant predictor in three of the seven logistic regressions, indicating that male and female respondents were not distributed to the conditions in a truly random sense. Education was a significant predictor in four of the seven regressions, and party identification was a significant predictor in three of the regressions.

Based on these results, I re-estimated the four main models above with gender, educational attainment, and party identification included as control variables. If a demographic skew was the cause of the unusual findings for my medium knowledge respondents, I hypothesized that the addition of the controls would result in findings that made more sense from a theoretical standpoint. Unfortunately, adding these control variables to my model did not change the results to any significant degree—nothing was significant for high and low knowledge respondents, the same conditions remained significant for medium knowledge respondents and as before, all of the significant coefficients were positive.
Because the addition of control variables to my models did not explain the strange results yielded by my frames, I next considered the possibility that something related to the wording of the frames caused the uniformly positive results. A close look at the framing statements yields a second possible explanation for the curious results observed with my medium knowledge subgroup of respondents. Appendix C contains the wording of all seven framing statements.

Consider the non-ideological negative framing statement as an example.

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Some have argued that the legislature's new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

Each of the framing statements contained two components—first, a sentence that was common to all six treatment conditions that informed respondents that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the then-existing system of funding public schools in the state, followed by a carefully-tailored evaluative judgment of the state legislature’s new funding plan. Unfortunately, each of these treatments is focused more on the state legislature than on the Ohio Supreme Court, and I hypothesized that the problematic positive findings were a result of the legislative focus of my treatments. The issue of school funding in Ohio is complicated and the fight over the case has been between a Republican-dominated state legislature and a state supreme court that also has a Republican majority. Complicating things still further, the court’s school funding decision in 2000 resulted from one of the Republicans on the court, Justice Andrew Douglas, switching positions on the case. The complexity of the case made it very
difficult for me to create simple framing statements that captured the complicated nature of this case effectively. One inference that follows from the legislative focus of my frames is that all of the frames were favorable to the court and that as a result, they would have a differential effect for support for the state legislature. I investigated this hypothesis by using two legislative variables as the dependent variables in a series of eight new models. Obviously, if this hypothesis were true (and thus, that the legislative focus of my frames was the reason for the unusual results), then I should see the frames operate in their expected directions for support for the legislature—that is, with positive frames increasing approval of the legislature and negative frames decreasing approval.

As noted above, I tested this hypothesis with two separate sets of models. The first used respondent’s approval of the state legislature as the dependent variable and the condition dummies as the predictor variables. The second model used respondents’ grade of how Republicans in the state legislature have handled the state’s school funding problem as the dependent variable and the condition dummies as predictors. I estimated each model for the full sample and for the three knowledge subgroups.

Table 5.8 reports data from the four models that used legislative approval as the dependent variable. The results displayed in Table 5.8 for the legislative approval dependent variable do not support my hypothesis that the legislative focus of the frames is the cause of the treatments’ strange effects on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. If the substantive focus of my framing statements was the cause of my uniformly positive results, the positive frames should increase support for the legislature and negative frames should decrease it. We do not see this pattern. Instead, we see that my treatments generally were not significant influences on respondents’ approval of the state
legislature. In all but one case where the frames were significant predictors of approval, the signs were opposite of my expectations, with positive frames having negative coefficients, and the negative frames having positive coefficients. I also re-ran the four models using party identification, educational attainment, and ideology as control variables. The addition of these control variables, as before, had no significant influence on the results. I concluded from these analyses that the frames’ influence on approval for the state legislature was not the cause of their unexpected effects on support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Before ruling out my hypothesis that the wording of the frames and their legislative focus was the cause of the frames’ unusual effects, I tested the influence of the frames on one other legislative variable. This variable asked respondents to use a scale that ran from A to F to grade the performance of Republicans on the state legislature on the school funding issue. I recoded this variable so that the scale ran from F to A (F presumably signifying no support for Republicans on the state legislature and A signifying a high level of support for Republicans in the state legislature) and I used this variable as my dependent variable for a series of four new regression models that, as before, used the condition dummies as predictor variables. Table 5.9 contains the results of these four new regressions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b, full sample</th>
<th>b, high knowledge Rs</th>
<th>b, medium knowledge Rs</th>
<th>b, low knowledge Rs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.718*** (.063)</td>
<td>2.844*** (.099)</td>
<td>2.568*** (.087)</td>
<td>2.800*** (.176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: general, positive frame</td>
<td>-.039 (.092)</td>
<td>-.306** (.135)</td>
<td>.465** (.153)</td>
<td>-.126 (.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: general, negative frame</td>
<td>.027 (.087)</td>
<td>-.219 (.167)</td>
<td>.198* (.112)</td>
<td>.025 (.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: non-ideological 2 message positive/negative frame</td>
<td>-.008 (086)</td>
<td>.156 (.140)</td>
<td>-.166 (.126)</td>
<td>-.101 (.204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Republican, positive frame</td>
<td>.035 (.093)</td>
<td>-.103 (.146)</td>
<td>.148 (.139)</td>
<td>.043 (.227)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Democratic, negative frame</td>
<td>.032 (.087)</td>
<td>-.191 (.135)</td>
<td>.176 (.132)</td>
<td>.166 (.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: 2 message, mixed Republican/Democratic frame</td>
<td>.120 (.086)</td>
<td>-.059 (.137)</td>
<td>.279** (.127)</td>
<td>.119 (.208)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10  
** p < .05  
*** p < .01

Table 5.8: Treatments as Predictors of Legislative Approval (standard errors in parentheses)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b, full sample</th>
<th>b, high knowledge Rs</th>
<th>b, medium knowledge Rs</th>
<th>b, low knowledge Rs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.558*** (.099)</td>
<td>2.993*** (.155)</td>
<td>2.312*** (.146)</td>
<td>1.718*** (.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: general, positive frame</td>
<td>.119 (.144)</td>
<td>-.311 (.212)</td>
<td>.532** (.256)</td>
<td>.734** (.330)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: general, negative frame</td>
<td>.214 (.138)</td>
<td>.051 (.251)</td>
<td>.312 (.194)</td>
<td>1.105** (.319)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: non-ideological 2 message positive/negative frame</td>
<td>.138 (.135)</td>
<td>-.428* (.220)</td>
<td>.532** (.212)</td>
<td>.975** (.300)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Republican, positive frame</td>
<td>.220 (.145)</td>
<td>-.251 .236</td>
<td>.464** (.221)</td>
<td>1.130** (.327)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Democratic, negative frame</td>
<td>.425** (.135)</td>
<td>.064 (.206)</td>
<td>.545** (.223)</td>
<td>1.262*** (.313)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: 2 message, mixed Republican/Democratic frame</td>
<td>.324** (.134)</td>
<td>-.120 (.576)</td>
<td>.722** (.208)</td>
<td>.932** (.308)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10  
** p < .05  
*** p < .01

Table 5.9: Treatment Conditions as Predictors of Performance Evaluations of Republican Legislators on the School Funding Issue (standard errors in parentheses)
In contrast to the results displayed in Table 5.8, we see that my framing statements display a variety of significant relationships to how respondents graded the performance of Republicans in the state legislature on the school funding issue. A closer look at Table 5.9, however, reveals that the results for the most part are contrary to my theoretical expectations. For the full sample, the Democratic negative framing condition displayed a significant positive sign, meaning that respondents who received this condition graded the performance of Republicans in the state legislature more positively than other respondents—a result that makes little sense. Table 5.9 also shows that respondents who received the frame containing explicitly partisan positive and negative messages also graded Republicans more positively than the control group. Because I wondered whether party identification or respondent’s ideology mediated these results, I re-ran the model with party identification and ideology as control variables. Unfortunately, the addition of these control variables had no influence on the results for the full sample.

Looking at the results displayed in Table 5.9 for the subgroups of high, medium, and low-knowledge respondents displays even more striking results. First, in contrast to all of the other models, the framing conditions predict how respondents graded Republican legislators best for low-knowledge respondents—not for medium knowledge respondents, as has been the case with all of my other models. Additionally, with one exception, all of the significant variables display positive signs, regardless of the valence of the framing statement. The treatments had a negative relationship to respondents’ grades only for those respondents in the high-knowledge subgroup who received the non-ideological two-message frame. Aside from that, however, Table 5.9 displays the same
puzzling results seen with the equations that used diffuse support as the dependent variable. In order to be sure that demographic differences between respondents in each condition were not the cause of the unusual results, I re-ran all four models using party identification, educational attainment, and ideology included as control variables. Unfortunately, these control variables, as before, had no significant influence on the results and did not help to explain the almost uniformly positive signs.

The latter part of this chapter has focused on trying to explain the almost uniformly positive influence of my framing statements on support for the Ohio Supreme Court. I investigated two possible explanations for the unusual results observed in Tables 5.5 through 5.7: first, whether respondents assigned to each treatment condition were not a random sample of the larger sample, and thus, were skewed on one or more demographic variables. My analyses demonstrated that this hypothesis did not explain the uniformly positive signs seen in Tables 5.5 through 5.7.

Because the frames were focused more on the state legislature than on the court, I hypothesized that the frames would work as expected when a legislative variable was substituted the dependent variable in my model. I tested this hypothesis using two legislative variables—generalized approval of the state legislature, and respondents’ grades of the performance of Republicans in the state legislature on the school funding issue. In the former case, the treatments explained almost none of the variance of legislative approval. In the latter case, the treatments were strong predictors of the grade given to Republican legislators, but as before, the signs were almost uniformly positive. Unfortunately, the inconclusive results from these diagnostic analyses leave me with the conclusion that my experiment simply failed to work as anticipated. Although I remain
unable to explain the positive signs evident in the tables above, I suspect that my experiment failed because it did not adequately account for the complex nature of the school funding issue and the court fight.

Conclusion

This chapter had two primary purposes. First, I sought to determine whether elite messages, as operationalized in my framing statements, could influence diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Second, I tested whether Zaller’s one-message and two-message models explained how elite messages influence support for the court. Using a more comprehensive variant of the model presented in chapter 4, the analyses presented in this chapter have shown that elite messages—as operationalized in my framing statements—do appear to be a significant influence on diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Moreover, the analyses demonstrated that the impact of elite messages on support for the court appeared to depend on respondents’ levels of political knowledge, with respondents who held medium levels of political knowledge being most influenced by the framing statements and respondents in both the high and low knowledge subgroups demonstrating little or no influence from the manipulation. The striking finding that elite messages appeared to have the strongest influence on support for medium knowledge respondents was consistent with my expectations and with Zaller’s theoretical framework.

The data presented in this chapter also tested whether Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite-led opinion formation and change could characterize support for the Ohio Supreme Court. As discussed above, my data generally provide little support for Zaller’s one-message and two message models of support. However, I do not
interpret my findings as an indication that Zaller’s one-message and two-message models of elite-mass influence are incorrect. Instead, I regard my unusual findings as an indication that my experimental manipulations did not work properly. The fact that virtually all of the significant coefficients were positive (regardless of the valence of the treatment), and that the diagnostic analyses I ran did not explain the results lead me to the simple conclusion that my experiment failed to produce the effects I expected. As noted above, the school funding issue is very complicated and I hypothesize that the straightforward nature of my treatments simply was unable to capture the dynamics of opinion formation and change on this issue. Because the primary component of my experiment failed to work as I hypothesized, the next question becomes what else, if anything, my data can tell us about the nature of support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

The next chapter addresses this question and uses the rich data on the Ohio Supreme Court and the state government gathered as part of the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll to investigate the relationship between three types of support for the Ohio Supreme Court—diffuse support, specific support, and specific support for the court’s 2000 decision on the school funding issue.
CHAPTER 6

PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR THE OHIO SUPREME COURT ACROSS THREE TYPES OF MEASURES

Introduction

Chapter 4 described levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court and explained the correlates of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Chapter 5 contained an in-depth analysis of my survey-based experiment and attempted to test whether Zaller’s one-message and two message models of elite-mass communication accurately characterized how elite messages influenced diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. The uniformly positive coefficients displayed in the analyses in chapter 5 demonstrated that my experiment did not operate as I anticipated. As a result, I was left with the rather unsatisfying conclusion that while it appeared that elite messages (as operationalized in my framing statements) could influence the levels of diffuse support expressed by respondents for the Ohio Supreme Court, the exact dynamics of this influence were not clear. Unfortunately, probing the nature of elite influence on support for the court further is not possible with my existing data.

For that reason, this chapter takes a different approach to the question of support for the Ohio Supreme Court and uses my experimental data in a cross-sectional sense to analyze the patterns of opinions expressed by respondents on three measures of support for the Ohio Supreme Court that were included in my experimental dataset—namely, diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, generalized specific support for the Ohio
Supreme Court, and specific support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case. In doing so, this chapter breaks new ground by looking at a third, more focused type of specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court—support for the court’s decision in a single, high-profile case—and how this type of support is related to the more standard measures of diffuse and specific support. More importantly, this chapter uses these three measures of support to create a typology of respondents and uses multivariate analyses to create a demographic and attitudinal profile of respondents who expressed similar levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court on my measures of support, and of those respondents who expressed high levels of support on one measure but lower levels of support on one or more of the other measures. That is, this chapter focuses on similarity and dissimilarity in respondents’ opinions across my three measures of support. This type of analysis is not new, in that Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968) conducted similar types of analyses in their work on support for the U.S. Supreme Court. Aside from uncovering the demographic and attitudinal factors that are associated with respondents’ patterns of support on my three measures, this chapter looks at how support for a single decision of the Ohio Supreme Court is related to the more standard (and general) measures of diffuse and specific support.

Cross-sectional analysis of experimental data

It might be argued that analyzing experimental data in a standard cross-sectional manner is inappropriate, given that we generally can expect that an experimental treatment will have a differential influence on various subgroups in the population of interest. Chapter 5 demonstrated, however, that my experiment did not demonstrate the differential impact I expected. Instead, where my manipulation had an influence on
diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, that influence was positive, meaning that the experiment buoyed support for the court, regardless of the treatment condition particular respondents were assigned to. From this, I argue that it is possible to analyze my experimental data in a cross-sectional sense, as long as I am focusing on measuring fundamental relationships between variables and not on reporting point estimates of support. Certainly, however, using experimental data in a cross-sectional sense is suboptimal and in the absence of resources to collect additional data, it is something I have done both cautiously and as a last resort. Furthermore, in order to rule out the possibility that the experiment is responsible for the results presented below, I have run additional analyses using two subgroups of the full sample; the first includes only those respondents who were randomly assigned to the control group (n=110), while the second includes just those respondents who were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment conditions (n=683). I have reported these additional analyses in selected instances below and have been careful to note when the results for one or both of the subgroups differs significantly from those obtained for the full sample.

Theoretical expectations

Easton (1965) argued that specific support and diffuse support for political institutions have a direct but weak relationship. In practice this means that courts and other political institutions that enjoy high levels of diffuse support also tend to have high levels of specific support for the outputs of the institution. Even though citizens might disagree with a specific decision (or series of decisions) made by a political institution, Easton argued that this type of dissatisfaction with specific decisions or policy outputs of a political organizations usually would not impact support for the institution’s decision-
making processes or diffuse support for the institution, unless the institution continually made decisions that citizens disagreed with. Research on support for courts (Segal 1995, Olson and Huth 1998, Hoekstra 2000) has provided empirical support for Easton’s argument that specific support and diffuse support are directly related. As described more fully in chapter 2, Segal (1995) found that specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court had a direct relationship to diffuse support, with respondents who thought that the Court was doing a good job also expressing the greatest support for the Court as a political institution (68). Olson and Huth (1998) found that specific support and diffuse support were less theoretically distinct for state and local courts than for the U.S. Supreme Court, and argued that the concepts were strongly related for state and local courts. Finally, Hoekstra (2000) found that affect toward specific decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court could influence diffuse support for the Court, thus providing further evidence of a relationship between diffuse and specific support.

This body of theory and research on the relationship between diffuse and specific support led me to my first theoretical premise about relative levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court--that respondents would form similar judgments of support across my three measures of support. That is, based on previous research that has found that diffuse and specific support are closely related, I expected generally that respondents who expressed high levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court also would express high levels of generalized specific support and high levels of support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case. Although this premise also is consistent with Krosnick’s (1991, 1999) theory of satisficing, which posits that the cognitively intense task of answering survey questions motivates respondents to use shortcuts to answer
survey questions (such as answering similar questions in similar ways), I argue that a different theoretical mechanism drives similarity for my measures of support. Simply, my argument is that levels of similarity in my dataset result from a close conceptual relationship between diffuse support, specific support, and support for specific decisions and from respondents employing similar banks of considerations to answer questions about each type of support.

Easton’s argument that a lack of public support for specific decisions made by a political institution in most cases would not have an immediate influence on diffuse support for a political institution led me to a caveat to this theoretical premise. While I expected similarity in general across my three measures, I also expected that the three measures of support would not have a direct relationship for a significant minority of respondents in my sample, and thus, that this subset of my respondents would express dissimilar judgments of support across my measures.

However, Zaller (1992) and the research presented in chapter 5 suggest that political knowledge will have a significant influence on the patterns of support expressed by respondents in my sample. Although the experimental manipulation detailed in chapter 5 was not entirely successful, it did show that diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court could be influenced by elite-based framing statements. These results were strongest for respondents with lower levels of political knowledge, and weakest for respondents with higher levels of political knowledge. This finding that high-knowledge respondents had stronger and more firmly rooted opinions is consistent with Zaller’s (1992) theoretical framework. As discussed more fully in chapter 3, this difference between high and low knowledge respondents is due to high knowledge respondents
having banks of considerations on many political issues that are well-developed and well-organized. This political knowledge distinction leads to a second theoretical premise that will guide the analyses below.

My second premise holds that the patterns of opinions across the three measures of support will be most similar for respondents with high levels of political knowledge (those who presumably have the best-developed opinions toward the Ohio Supreme Court), and less similar for respondents with low levels of political knowledge (those who presumably have weaker opinions toward the court and less developed banks of considerations). Both of these theoretical premises serve as the foundation for many of the more detailed theoretical expectations that follow in the pages below.

**Missing data across the three measures of support**

As noted above, the purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain patterns in the levels of support expressed by respondents on my measures of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court, specific support for the outputs of the Ohio Supreme Court, and support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case.

Before proceeding farther, however, a problem of missing data across my three measures of support must be addressed. Missing data is not a problem for my measure of diffuse support, in that it is an additive scale comprised of three or four variables (depending on which of my two datasets is used). However, my composite measure of specific support was operationalized as the average of respondents’ judgments of specific support on two individual questions measuring specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Similarly, my measure of support for the Ohio Supreme Court’s decision in the school funding case is based on data from a single question on my survey. The low
salience of both the subject area and of the source variables I had available meant that both measures of specific support had high levels of item non-response. For my composite measure of specific support for the court, 103 of the 793 cases (or 13 percent) had system-missing values. This was due to respondents offering “refused” and/or “don’t know” responses on one or both of the source variables that comprised my specific support measure. Similarly, when respondents were asked to evaluate the Ohio Supreme Court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case, 147 of the 793 respondents (or 19 percent) answered “don’t know” or “refused.”

These levels of missing data are high, and pose very real problems in terms of efficiency and bias to my analysis. After all, one can argue that respondents who answered “don’t know” or “refused” to one or more of the specific support questions have different attitudes toward the Ohio Supreme Court than respondents who provided an answer. In a practical sense, the missing data will result in bias in my analyses to the extent that respondents who answered the specific support questions are substantively and demographically different from those who did not.

In order to minimize the possibility of bias in my data due to item non-response on these measures, I used Gary King’s *Amelia* program and its sophisticated algorithms to impute values for these respondents on my three source measures of specific support. Amelia is based on the widely accepted statistical theory of multiple imputation of missing data and is designed to align how social scientists analyze data with missing values with the recommendations of the statistics community (Honaker, et al., 2). Appendix D contains further details about the *Amelia* computer program and how its multiple imputation routines were used to eliminate item-nonresponse on my measures of...
specific support. I then used my additive index of diffuse support, along with the new, imputed versions of my measures of specific support as the dependent variables in the analyses that follow.

**Similarity of opinions across my three measures of support**

Before describing the patterns of answers across my three measures of support, the general relationships between my three measures of support first must be explained. In this chapter, I have explored this relationship in two ways. I begin below with a series of correlation matrices that show the general associations between my three measures of support for the full sample, and for my three political knowledge subgroups. The correlational analyses are an important first cut at the question of patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, in that any patterns of support across the three measures are meaningless if there is little or no evidence of a significant relationship between the measures. I then investigated the relationships between these measures further using a set of cross-tabulations that highlight actual patterns of support across my three measures that are of high theoretical or practical interest.

To preview the results explained in more detail below, the correlation matrices show that my support measures are significantly related and that the association between the variables tends to be positive in nature. The cross-tabulations that follow the correlation matrices provide further details on the nature of the relationships by showing actual patterns of support for my respondents across the three measures of support. Although the cross-tabulations provide definitive evidence about actual patterns of support present in my data, I have collapsed individual scale points on each measure into one of three categories to facilitate presenting the results below. As a result, the cross-
tabulations cannot ensure that the same categorical responses to different questions really represent answers that fall on the same points on the scales used in my individual measures of support. That is, the categorization scheme I developed may mean that patterns of similarity observed in the crosstabulations may not actually represent real similarity of opinions. However, because the correlation matrices use my original measures of support (and not my collapsed categorical measures), they directly address the question of covariation across my measures of support. As a result, the correlation matrices present additional evidence that is useful in interpreting the data contained in the crosstabulations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffuse Support</th>
<th>Specific Support</th>
<th>Support for Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Support</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.275**</td>
<td>.496**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Decision</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.109**</td>
<td>.496**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=793
** indicates correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6.1: Correlation Matrix for Three Measures of Support for the Ohio Supreme Court

Table 6.1 shows the correlations between my three measures of support for all 793 respondents in my sample. The table demonstrates that my three measures of support have significant positive correlations. That is, respondents who supported the
court’s decision in the school funding case also tended to support the court’s outputs in a more general sense, and tended to support the court as a political institution. However, Table 6.1 also demonstrates that the relationships between the three measures of support tend to be weak—especially between diffuse support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. This finding provides support for Easton’s argument that citizen dissatisfaction with specific decisions or policy outputs of a political organization typically does not have immediate impact on diffuse support for the institution, unless the institution continually made decisions that citizens are unable to support.

In order to rule out the possibility that the data displayed in Table 6.1 was influenced by my framing experiment, Tables 6.2 and 6.3 are displayed below. Table 6.2 includes just those 110 respondents who were randomly assigned to the control group, while Table 6.3 includes the remaining 693 respondents who were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment conditions. Table 6.2 is presented below.
The pattern seen in Table 6.1 also holds for the 110 control group respondents. All three measures of support have positive (and statistically significant) correlations. Once again we see that respondents who supported the court’s decision in the school funding case also tended to support the court’s outputs in a more general sense, and tended to support the court as a political institution. The only noteworthy difference appears to be that the association between diffuse support and specific support seems to be stronger for respondents in the control group than for the full sample. However, the small number of respondents in the control group means that this finding must be interpreted with caution. Table 6.3 is shown below and presents the same correlation matrix for the 693 respondents who were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment conditions.
Table 6.3 shows that the associations between my three measures of support are virtually identical to those seen for the full sample and for the control group subset of the sample. All three of my measures demonstrate a positive and statistically significant association—showing that respondents in the treatment conditions who support the court’s decision in the school funding case also tend to support the court’s outputs in a more general sense, and tend to support the court as a political institution. More importantly, the data in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 show that my experimental treatments did not change the fundamental nature of the relationships between my measures of support; the data also reinforce my argument that my survey-based experiment did not have a substantial differential impact on absolute levels of specific and diffuse support expressed by respondents in my sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffuse Support</th>
<th>Specific Support</th>
<th>Support for Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.095*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Support</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.243**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.496**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Decision</td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.095*</td>
<td>.496**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=693

** indicates correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)
* indicates correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Table 6.3: Correlation Matrix for Respondents Assigned to Treatment Conditions
Although I found the positive association I expected between my three measures of support for the full sample (and for the subsets of control-group and treatment group respondents shown in Tables 6.2 and 6.3), I expected—in accordance with Zaller (1992)—that the strength of the associations between these measures would depend on respondents’ levels of political knowledge. That is, I expected that the relationships between the variables would be strongest for respondents with high levels of political knowledge and weakest for respondents with little to no political knowledge. For this reason, I investigated the relationships between the variables for three subgroups in my sample: high knowledge respondents, medium knowledge respondents, and low-knowledge respondents. Table 6.4 (below) presents the same information for the subgroup of respondents who had high levels of political knowledge.
Table 6.4: Correlation Matrix for High Knowledge Respondents

Table 6.4 demonstrates that the positive relationships between my three variables seen in for the full sample in Table 6.1 also hold for my subsample of high knowledge respondents. As expected, Table 6.4 demonstrates that the correlations between the three measures are stronger for high-knowledge respondents than for the entire sample. However, the difference is marginal at best.
Table 6.5: Correlation Matrix for Medium Knowledge Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffuse Support</th>
<th>Specific Support</th>
<th>Support for Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Corr.</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.287**</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.350</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Support</strong></td>
<td>.287**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.464**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2 tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for Decision</strong></td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.464**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2 tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.350</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=278

** indicates correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6.5 shows the same correlation matrix for the 278 medium knowledge respondents in my sample. It demonstrates that the relationship between my three measures of support is much less strong and stable for medium-knowledge respondents than for high-knowledge respondents and the full sample. Although specific support and diffuse support had a significant positive relationship, and specific support and support for the court’s decision also had a strong and significant positive correlation, there was no significant relationship between diffuse support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. This finding provides evidence that the relationships between the three measures are less stable and consistent for medium knowledge respondents than for other the other subgroups investigated thus far.

Finally, Table 6.6 shows the correlations between the three measures of support for the 166 low-knowledge respondents in my sample. I expected that judgments of support by these respondents would be much less similar across my three measures than
for any of the other political knowledge subgroups. Table 6.4 (presented below) shows that although the differences between medium knowledge and low knowledge respondents are marginal, of the three subgroups examined here, low-knowledge respondents generally had the weakest associations between the three variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffuse Support</th>
<th>Specific Support</th>
<th>Support for Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Corr.</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.217**</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Support</strong></td>
<td>.217**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.425**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2 tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.005</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for Decision</strong></td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.425**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2 tailed)</strong></td>
<td>.113</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=166
** indicates correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6.6: Correlation Matrix for Low Knowledge Respondents

However, the data displayed in Table 6.6 show the same general relationship between the three measures of support—namely, a significant positive association between diffuse support and specific support and specific support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. However, again we see no significant relationship between diffuse support and respondents’ support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case. The small number (n=166) of respondents who fell into the low knowledge subgroup means that this finding should be interpreted with caution.
When taken together, the data in Tables 6.1 through 6.6 show that the associations between my three measures of support, while positive and generally significant, are not strong. However, the data confirm my theoretical expectation that my three measures of support for the Ohio Supreme Court generally have a positive relationship—that is, respondents who supported the court’s decision in the school funding case also tended to support the outputs of the court more generally, and tended to support the Ohio Supreme Court as an institution. In keeping with my expectations, Tables 6.4 through 6.6 demonstrated that the associations between my measures were strongest for respondents in my sample who had high levels of political knowledge, and weaker for respondents with lower levels of political knowledge.

In many respects, however, the similarities between the knowledge subgroups shown in Tables 6.2 through 6.4 are more noteworthy than the differences, in that for the most part, the same general relationships seen between the measures for the full sample also held for each of the knowledge subgroups. Even though the Tables showed significant positive relationships between the measures, the relationships between the variables appear to be weak. Looking at Tables 6.1 through 6.6 comparatively demonstrates that in no case did variation in one measure of support account for a majority of the variation in one of the other measures of support, thus providing evidence that a substantial number of respondents expressed judgments of support for the court that differed significantly across my three measures.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to categorize respondents based on their patterns of support toward the Ohio Supreme Court and to investigate the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of respondents who hold each pattern of support. Thus,
although the correlation matrices above are useful and demonstrate that my measures of support are significantly related, the correlations by themselves cannot provide information about the distribution of respondents’ judgments of support across my three types of support.

My next goal was to identify respondents in the sample who expressed judgments of support that were similar across my measures of support and to identify respondents who expressed judgments of support on one or more of the measures that were significantly different from their judgment of support on one or more of the other measures. To do this, I recoded each measure of support into a new categorical variable that took one of three values: low support, medium support, and high support. I categorized respondents by dividing the range of response categories for each measure into three parts—respondents whose answer fell in the first third of the response options were placed into the low support category, respondents in the second third were placed in the medium support category, and respondents whose judgment fell in the final third of the response options were placed in the high support category. Although in some senses this rule was arbitrary, I used it because it allowed me 1) to categorize respondents in the same manner across my three measures of support, and more importantly, 2) to create these new categorical variables in a way that was independent of what any single respondent answered on one or more of the measures, and independent of the distribution of a particular measure.

I used these three new categorical variables to create a series of crosstabulations of respondents’ judgments of support for the Ohio Supreme Court; these crosstabulations allowed me to identify respondents whose judgments were similar and dissimilar across
my measures of support. For the sake of simplicity, I have presented multiple two-way crosstabulations below instead of a single three-way crosstabulation. Table 6.7 (presented below) is the first of the crosstabulations and looks at patterns of diffuse and specific support for respondents in my sample. The large amount of work by scholars on the relationship between specific and diffuse support makes this crosstabulation the most theoretically grounded and in many respects, the most important. Table 6.8 follows and presents a crosstabulation of specific support and respondents’ support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case.

I also could have presented a crosstabulation of diffuse support and respondents’ support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case. I have not presented this crosstabulation due to concerns about its theoretical relevance and substantive utility. Easton argued that although measures of diffuse and specific support were positively related, the relationship between the measures was weak. This argument is supported by the correlation matrices above and means simply that we must expect both similarity and dissimilarity in respondents’ judgments of diffuse and specific support.

Implied in Easton’s framework, however, is the argument that respondents who express similar judgments of diffuse and specific support and those whose judgments are dissimilar are systematically different subgroups of respondents—thus meaning that membership in either group can be predicted by some combination of attitudinal and demographic variables. Easton would be likely to argue, however, that the relationship between diffuse support and support for a single decision would be much weaker than that between diffuse and specific support—basically that opinions toward a single decision in most instances will not have a significant influence on overall support for the
court as an institution. This argument is supported in a limited sense by the weaker and sometimes non-significant relationships shown in the correlation matrices above and is confirmed also in research by Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence (2003a, 2003b). The implication is that although we again must expect that respondents will express both similar and dissimilar judgments of support for the court as an institution and for the decision in the school funding case, the weaker relationship between these two variables means that differences between the “similar” and “dissimilar” subgroups may not be systematic—instead, it could be random noise that cannot be predicted. For these reasons, I have not presented a crosstabulation of diffuse support and support for the court’s decision.

Table 6.7 (below) contains a crosstabulation of specific and diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Based on Easton’s theoretical framework, the correlation matrices above, and my first theoretical premise, I expected that a significant proportion of the respondents in my sample would have similar judgments of diffuse and specific support. I also expected that a subset of respondents would express judgments that were not similar across these two variables. That pattern is exactly what we see in Table 6.7.

The first notable aspect of Table 6.7 is that respondents were located in all of the cells—a good indication that there is significant intra-respondent and inter-respondent variation in how respondents formed judgments of specific and diffuse support. If the concept of similarity is interpreted strictly, Table 6.7 shows that a substantial minority of respondents (345, or 44 percent) in the sample expressed similar judgments of support
across the two measures of support being looked at.\textsuperscript{3} However, it is respondents whose judgments of support on these two measures were dissimilar who are most interesting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court</th>
<th>Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Specific Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Diffuse Support</td>
<td>36 (18.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Diffuse Support</td>
<td>106 (54.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Diffuse Support</td>
<td>51 (26.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>193 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7: Patterns of Diffuse and Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court (column percentages in parentheses)

\textsuperscript{3} Defining the concept of similarity is inherently subjective, and the definition used above may well be an overly restrictive test of similarity. As the definition of similarity is relaxed, more respondents in the sample can be categorized as holding similar judgments of support for the Ohio Supreme Court across the three measures being focused on in this chapter.
Of the 445 respondents (or 56 percent of the sample) who expressed judgments that were not similar, 239 expressed levels of diffuse support that were higher than the levels of specific support they expressed. This finding is consistent with Easton’s framework. However, a significant number of respondents (206, or 46 percent of the dissimilar subgroup) expressed levels of specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court that were higher than the levels of diffuse support that they expressed. The magnitude of this finding is surprising and in contrast to what we would expect from Easton’s framework. His framework posits only that diffuse support functions as a reservoir of goodwill that can buffer political institutions from low levels of public support for its policies and outputs.

Although the data presented in Table 6.7 are useful in isolation, being able to compare those results with a baseline would help provide a sense of whether the patterns of support above are what we would expect to see, both in terms of patterns and effect sizes. The lack of published work on patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court (and for courts in general) makes this difficult to do, in that a good baseline for comparative purposes would be the patterns of support found in previous literature. However, two other baselines are possible. I could assume that responses to my questions are random, and from this, expect my baseline to be roughly equal numbers in all of the cells of my crosstabulation. However, this baseline is inconsistent with my argument that opinions toward the Ohio Supreme Court can be measured systematically, and it also does not comport well with Zaller’s theoretical framework. I have chosen to compute a baseline expectation from the marginal totals presented in Table 6.7 above. For each cell, I defined my baseline as the row marginal times the column marginal all divided by n (or
Although this baseline is endogenous, it does provide a sense of how the actual observed patterns of support compare to random combinations of respondents based on the marginal totals. Table 6.8 (below), compares observed patterns of support in my data with this marginal baseline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diffuse Support for the Ohio Supreme Court</th>
<th>Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Specific Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Diffuse Support</td>
<td>36 (18.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Diffuse Support</td>
<td>106 (54.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Diffuse Support</td>
<td>51 (26.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>193 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8: Comparisons of Patterns of Diffuse and Specific Support to Baseline (column percentages in parentheses)
Table 6.8 shows that the actual patterns of support in my data are different from what the baseline would predict. The most notable difference is that the baseline would predict a much smaller level of incidence for similarity than is what seen in my data.

From the table, 348 respondents (or 43.9 percent) in my sample expressed similar levels of diffuse and specific support. My baseline calculation shows that only 286 respondents (or 36.1 percent) would be likely to express similar levels of diffuse support. Obviously, the actual patterns in my data show substantially more similarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support than my baseline would have led me to expect.

Table 6.9 presents a crosstabulation of specific support and respondents’ support for the Court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case. Aside from being substantively interesting, the analysis is meaningful because the high salience and widespread impact of the court’s decision mean that respondents in my sample would be much more likely than in other instances to have heard of the case and the court’s ruling, thus mitigating the possibility that the opinions expressed toward the ruling are random “non-attitudes.”

Easton’s theoretical framework and the correlation matrices presented above lead me to expect that a majority of respondents in the sample will express similar judgments on my two measures of specific support. Even so, I also expected that a significant proportion of my sample would express dissimilar opinions on my two measures of specific support. Table 6.9 confirms both of these expectations.

As with Table 6.7 (above), Table 6.9 demonstrates that respondents were located in all of the cells—again providing a good indication that there is significant variation in how respondents formed judgments of support across my two measures of specific support. More importantly, Table 6.9 shows that a slight majority of respondents in the
sample (416, or 52 percent) expressed similar judgments on both of my measures of specific support. However, once again it is respondents whose judgments of support on these two measures were dissimilar who are most interesting. Of the 377 respondents (or 48 percent of the sample) who expressed judgments that were not similar on the measures of specific support, 150 expressed higher levels of support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case than for the general outputs and policies of the court. The remaining 227 respondents expressed levels of general specific support for the court that were higher than their support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. In this case, either pattern is equally plausible from both substantive and theoretical standpoints.

| Support for the Court’s Decision in the 2000 School Funding Case | Specific Support for the Ohio Supreme Court |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Low Specific Support | Medium Specific Support | High Specific Support | Total |
| Low Support for Decision | 103 (53.4) | 67 (23.0) | 27 (8.7) | 197 (24.8) |
| Medium Support for Decision | 77 (39.9) | 164 (56.4) | 133 (43.0) | 374 (47.2) |
| High Support for Decision | 13 (6.7) | 60 (20.6) | 149 (48.2) | 222 (48.2) |
| Total | 193 (100.0) | 291 (100.0) | 309 (100.0) | 793 (100.0) |

Table 6.9: Patterns of Specific Support and Support for the School Funding Decision (column percentages in parentheses)
The differences highlighted above in Tables 6.7 and 6.9 show, quite simply, that the structure of public attitudes toward the court’s policies and decisions is complex and that it varies widely across respondents in my sample. Furthermore, the patterns in Table 6.9 argue for understanding specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court both as a function of opinions toward individual decisions made by the court and as a function of the public’s general feelings toward the court’s outputs. Most traditional analyses of support for courts operationalize specific support only as general support of the court’s outputs as a whole—insinuating that individual decisions matter only to the extent that they influence the valence of the total mixture of considerations that respondents call up when they think about a court’s policies. My data argue that high-salience, controversial cases (such as the court’s decision in the school funding case) can have an independent (and in some cases, determinative) influence on overall specific support for a court.

To provide a sense of whether the levels of similarity in Table 6.9 are greater than what we would expect randomly, I again calculated a baseline using the marginal totals for each type of support. Those results are presented below in Table 6.10.
The pattern seen in Table 6.8 for the baseline comparisons of diffuse and specific support also holds here, in that the baseline again predicts a much smaller level of incidence for similarity than is what seen in my data. My data show that 416 of my 793 respondents (or 52 percent) expressed similar judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case, while the baseline calculation predicts that only 271 respondents (or 34 percent of the sample) would have expressed similar views. This again is a substantial difference that shows that the actual incidence of similarity with my measures of specific support is higher than I would expect by chance.
Correlates of subgroup membership

The correlation matrices presented earlier, along with the data in Tables 6.7 and 6.9, focused on describing the relationships between my measures of support, along with patterns of responses to my measures. The data presented in Tables 6.1 through 6.9 provide strong support for the general theoretical premises outlined earlier in the chapter. Simply, although a majority of respondents in my sample expressed similar judgments of support on my three measures, a significant minority also expressed dissimilar judgments of support. Because a second goal of this chapter is to identify the attitudinal and demographic variables that predict the similar or dissimilar patterns of support held by respondents in my sample, the focus of this chapter now shifts toward using multivariate analyses to explain the demographic and attitudinal variables that account for the patterns of support observed in Tables 6.7 and 6.9.

Two sets of equations are presented in the tables below. The first set looks at similarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support, while the second looks at similarity in judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. Because I am looking at similarity for two separate pairs of support variables, I develop separate expectations for each set of multivariate analyses that follows below.

Similarity in Judgments of Diffuse and Specific Support

Table 6.7 (above) focuses on diffuse and specific support and highlights three primary patterns of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court—similar judgments of diffuse and specific support, higher levels of diffuse support than specific support, and higher levels of specific support for the court than diffuse support. Each
respondent in my sample expressed one of these three patterns of diffuse and specific support. I used multinomial logit analysis to estimate multivariate models of the demographic and attitudinal differences between respondents who held each of the three patterns of support described above.

My first step at analyzing similarity between diffuse and specific support was to develop a multivariate model that was capable of predicting the various patterns of diffuse and specific support expressed by respondents. Because none of the presently existing theoretical models of support for courts focus on similarity between measures of support, I drew on the existing literature on support for courts for guidance on attitudinal and demographic predictor variables to include in the model. I included a variety of attitudinal and demographic variables in my model that have been found in previous work to have a significant relationship to absolute levels of support for courts on the assumption that many of these variables also will have a significant relationship to the relative patterns of support expressed by respondents and thus, to similarity of judgments of diffuse and specific support. I relied on the theoretical premises above and the findings from previous work to develop theoretical expectations about each variable included in my model. In some cases, unfortunately, I was not able to develop expectations about how individual predictor variables in the model would be related to patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Where possible, however, I have developed expectations that have two parts—first, an expectation about whether a variable will display a significant relationship to levels of similarity, and second, an expectation about the direction of that influence.
Findings from the existing literature on support for courts helped me to identify the demographic variables I included in my model. Segal (1995) found that gender was related to diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court and that women expressed different levels of support than men. Voelker and Kritzer (1990) found the same relationship between gender and support for Wisconsin state courts. Consistent with this research, I expected that gender would be a significant predictor of the pattern of support expressed by respondents. However, I did not have a priori expectations of how gender would influence the degree or direction of similarity expressed by respondents across my measures of support. For that reason, I treat gender as a control variable in the equations that follow.

Caldeira and Gibson (1992) found that race was a significant predictor of both diffuse and specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court. They also found that blacks’ opinions toward the Court were the result of the Court’s landmark civil rights decisions in the 1960s, and that those opinions tended to be stable over time and deeply rooted. I included race in my model, and in keeping with their findings and my second premise (above), hypothesized that the seemingly deep roots to blacks’ support for the U.S. Supreme Court would translate into similar judgments of support for blacks across my three measures of support for the Ohio Supreme Court.
As will be described below, multinomial logit analyses require the use of a base category, and my analyses treat similarity as the base category. As a result, variables will emerge as significant only if they have a significant relationship to one of the non-similar patterns of support. By expecting that race will function as a motivation for similar judgments of diffuse and specific support, I am expecting that race will not emerge as significant in the analyses below.

Murphy and Tanenhaus’ landmark 1968 study of support for the U.S. Supreme Court found that party identification had a significant relationship to support for the Court, with Republicans being more likely than Democrats to express diffuse and specific support for the Court. I included measures of party identification in my model for this reason. Although I expected that party identification would have a significant relationship to similarity and dissimilarity of judgments of diffuse and specific support, the unusual nature of the school funding fight left me unable to form specific a priori expectations about the influence of party identification on patterns of support. After all, in this context, a conservative Ohio Supreme Court repeatedly held a school funding system developed by a Republican state legislature and a Republican Governor to be unconstitutional. As with gender, party identification is included in the model primarily as a control variable.

Handberg and Maddox (1982) found education to be a significant predictor of trust in the U.S. Supreme Court, with more highly educated respondents expressing higher levels of trust in the Court. Consistent with my second theoretical premise, I expected that educational attainment would be display a significant relationship to similarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support. More specifically, I hypothesized
that more highly educated respondents would be more likely than other respondents to value education and thus, would see the court’s policy outputs (specific support) as beneficial toward education, and thus, especially positive. As such, I expected that high levels of education would be associated with dissimilarity and characterized by highly educated respondents expressing higher levels of specific support than diffuse support.

Flanagan et al., (1982) found that socioeconomic status (SES) was strongly related to support for state-level criminal courts, and that higher-SES respondents expressed more support for the courts. They also found that age had a strong inverse relationship to support for criminal courts, with older respondents expressing less support than younger respondents. The lack of research on patterns of support for courts meant that I did not have expectations about the influence of either of these variables on similarity in respondents’ judgments across my three measures. Based on these findings and the seeming relevance of SES and age to support for state-level courts, however, I included income and age as control variables in my model.

Although findings from the existing literature were the primary guide for the demographic variables I included in my model, I drew on one aspect of Zaller’s framework. As described above, Zaller argues strongly that political knowledge is a key mediating variable for many political attitudes. For this reason, I included political knowledge as a predictor variable in my multivariate model of respondents’ patterns of diffuse and specific support. I expected that political knowledge would have a direct relationship to similarity, meaning that high-knowledge respondents should express similar judgments of diffuse and specific support due to high knowledge respondents having better developed and more consistent banks of considerations about the Ohio
Supreme Court. Because low-knowledge respondents would be likely to have some awareness of the court’s decision in the school funding case (but would be less likely to have other information about the court to base their judgments of support on) I expected that low-knowledge respondents would express dissimilar judgments of support, with higher levels of specific support than diffuse support.

Findings from previous literature also led me to include a number of attitudinal variables in my model. Lehne and Reynolds (1978) found that the primary correlates of support for New Jersey state-level courts were support for the Governor and state legislature. This finding led me to include measures of support for Ohio’s state legislature and Ohio’s Governor in my model. I expected that diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court could be predicted by support for Ohio’s state legislature and by support for Governor Bob Taft. In the context of similarity, this meant that I expected that respondents in my sample who expressed support for the Ohio’s state legislature and Ohio’s Governor would express higher levels of diffuse support for the Ohio Supreme Court than specific support.

Segal (1995) found that opinions toward extra-court controversies (such as Watergate) and other political events could influence support for the U.S. Supreme Court. Her analysis of data from the 1974 National Election Study found that the Watergate scandal had “spillover” effects that served to depress diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court. Kritzer (2001) analyzed data collected after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision ending the 2000 Presidential election and came to a similar conclusion, in that the Court’s decision in the case influenced support for the Court along partisan lines. That is, Republicans (who presumably supported the decision) expressed more diffuse
support for the Court than Democrats. Although my dataset did not contain measures of controversial political issues, it did have a variable measuring respondents’ trust in Ohio’s state government. Because this variable serves as an indirect measure of respondents’ attitudes about how the state of Ohio has handled other political issues and controversies, I included the variable as a control in my model. I did not have any a priori expectations about its influence on similarity or dissimilarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support.

Finally, I included a variable measuring respondents’ support for the then-existing school funding system. I hypothesized that respondents’ opinions of the existing school funding system would be related to specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and that respondents who supported the existing funding system would express lower levels of specific support for the court than other respondents. I expected that this would result in a dissimilar pattern of support that was characterized by higher levels of diffuse support than specific support.

As noted above, multinomial logit was used to estimate similarity in respondents’ judgments of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. I have chosen multinomial logit as my estimation technique because of the categorical nature of my dependent variable and because I conceptualized respondents’ judgments of diffuse and specific support as events that occurred simultaneously—not as nested decisions that occurred in sequential order (Boorah 2001). In order to rule out the possibility that differences between my subgroups were the cause of any of the findings presented below, I estimated separate models for my full sample, for respondents in my treatment subgroup, and for respondents in my control group.
My multinomial logit models of similarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support included the predictor variables outlined above and my dependent variable was the new three category variable that captured the pattern of diffuse and specific support expressed by each respondent. Similarity between judgments of diffuse and specific support was my base category in each set of equations. Table 6.11 (below) presents the results of this model for my full sample and for respondents in my experimental and control subgroups. I present results for the experimental-only and control subgroups because the findings for these subgroups differ slightly from those for the full sample. Regardless of the subset of my sample, each equation compares the non-similar category indicated to my base category of similarity. In general, Table 6.11 demonstrate that across my full sample and the two subgroups, respondents who expressed non-similar judgments of support appeared to have different demographic and attitudinal characteristics than respondents who expressed similar levels of diffuse and specific support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Full Sample (n=793)</th>
<th>Exp. Only (n=683)</th>
<th>Control (n=110)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More DS than SS</td>
<td>More SS than DS</td>
<td>More DS than SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.45 (.18)</td>
<td>.29 (.20)</td>
<td>.45 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.55 (.29)</td>
<td>-.02 (.36)</td>
<td>.65 (.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>.04 (.11)</td>
<td>-.27 (.12)</td>
<td>.06 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.03 (.10)</td>
<td>-.41 (.10)</td>
<td>.05 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
<td>.23 (.01)</td>
<td>.22 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.01 (.07)</td>
<td>-.11 (.07)</td>
<td>.14 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Know.</td>
<td>-.02 (.08)</td>
<td>-.17 (.09)</td>
<td>.07 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of State Leg.</td>
<td>-.12 (.17)</td>
<td>.50 (.21)</td>
<td>.49 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Gov. Taft</td>
<td>-.08 (.18)</td>
<td>.65 (.22)</td>
<td>.57 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in OH Govt</td>
<td>.09 (.16)</td>
<td>-.30 (.17)</td>
<td>.07 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App. of Funding System.</td>
<td>.10 (.07)</td>
<td>.56 (.07)</td>
<td>.14 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.46 (.99)</td>
<td>2.60 (1.13)</td>
<td>.49 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=793 for full sample, 683 for experimental subgroup, and 110 for control group. Similarity is the base category. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels are based on two-tailed tests. Gender coded such that 0=female, 1=male; Race coded such that 0=not black, 1=black; Party ID coded such that 1=Democrat, 2=Republican, 3=Independent; Approval of legislature and funding system variables coded such that 1=strongly approve, 5=strongly disapprove; Trust in OH government coded so that 1=always and 4=never.

Table 6.11: Effects of Demographic and Attitudinal Variables on Patterns of Diffuse and Specific Support
For respondents in the full sample, both gender and race increased the likelihood of expressing more diffuse support than specific support. That is, being male and African-American decreased the probability of expressing similar levels of diffuse and specific support and increased the probability of expressing more diffuse than specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In keeping with my expectations, educational attainment was the strongest predictor of expressing a dissimilar pattern of more specific than diffuse support for the court, with low levels of education increasing the likelihood of respondents holding this pattern of support and consequently decreasing the likelihood of respondents holding the opposite pattern of support or of expressing similar patterns of support.

Additionally, compared to respondents who held similar levels of diffuse and specific support, party identification, political knowledge and trust in Ohio’s state government all were significant predictors of respondents expressing higher levels of specific support for the court than diffuse support. Although party identification and trust in Ohio’s government were included as controls, the results confirm my expectations for political knowledge. Compared to respondents who expressed similar views of support, respondents in the full sample who expressed more specific support than diffuse support also were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party, to have low levels of political knowledge, and to have higher levels of trust in Ohio’s state government than respondents who expressed other patterns of support.

The results noted below for my full sample generally held for respondents in my experimental subgroup. That is, compared to the treatment group respondents who expressed similar levels of support, gender and race again increased the likelihood that
respondents would express higher levels of diffuse than specific support; similarly, when compared to the base category, party identification, education, political knowledge, trust in Ohio’s government, and approval of the existing funding system again predicted that respondents would express higher levels of specific support than diffuse support. One additional variable emerged as a significant predictor for respondents in the experimental subgroup. Compared to treatment-group respondents who expressed similar levels of diffuse and specific support, age significantly increased the likelihood that treatment-group respondents would express more diffuse than specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. In practice, this indicates that respondents in the treatment conditions who expressed more diffuse than specific support tended to be older than respondents who expressed similar levels of diffuse and specific support.

The attitudinal and demographic predictors of holding a non-similar pattern of support differed more substantially for respondents in my control group. As before, gender was a significant predictor of respondents expressing higher levels of diffuse support than specific support, with control group respondents being more likely to be male than control group respondents who expressed similar levels of diffuse and specific support. For example, compared to control group respondents who expressed similar judgments of support, age was a significant predictor of respondents expressing more specific support than diffuse support. Because age had a negative sign (opposite of the finding for the experimental subgroup), control group respondents who expressed more specific support than diffuse support tended to be younger than respondents who expressed similar judgments of support across my measures of diffuse and specific support.
Table 6.11 also shows that for the control group, approval of Ohio’s state legislature had a powerful impact on holding a non-similar pattern of support. That is, when compared to control group respondents who expressed similar levels of support, disapproval of the state legislature increased the probability of control group respondents expressing more diffuse than specific support, while approval of the state legislature increased the probability of expressing the opposite pattern of support. These differential results across my experimental and control subgroups provide partial confirmation of my expectations. More importantly, the results in Table 6.11 stand in contrast to the findings in chapter 5 and provide limited evidence that my framing experiment had a small differential effect on respondents who were randomly assigned to the treatment conditions.

To clarify the influence of each of these variables on patterns of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I computed estimated probabilities of respondents expressing similar patterns of support in which I systematically manipulated the values of each of the significant predictor variables from their minimum values to their maximum values, while holding the other predictor variables to their medians. These estimates provide more detailed information on the independent influence of each of the independent variables that were significant in Table 6.9 (above) on the patterns of support expressed by respondents. Table 6.12 (below) displays these estimates. As before, I have presented results for my full sample and for the same two subsamples of respondents.
The results shown in Table 6.12 provide additional information about the magnitude of influence that each of the variables had on the pattern of diffuse and specific support expressed by respondents. For the full sample and the experimental subgroup, Table 6.12 demonstrates that as each of the independent variables was manipulated, the greatest degree of change generally occurred in the subgroup of respondents who expressed more specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court than diffuse support. Table 6.12 demonstrates that in all but two instances, manipulating each of the variables from their minimum to their maximum values substantially decreased the probability that respondents would express more specific support than diffuse support, and increased the likelihood of the respondent falling into one of the other two categories. As Table 6.12 shows, however, the results discussed below must be interpreted with caution in some cases (especially for the control subgroup) because the 95 percent confidence intervals for some of the results of the simulations are extremely wide. Moreover, although Table 6.12 shows the estimated probabilities and the associated confidence intervals, the interpretation that follows the Table converts the probabilities into percentages and discusses the changes in terms of percentages.
### Table 6.12: Estimated Changes in Probabilities of Expressing Three Patterns of Support As Predictor Variables Change from Minimum to Maximum Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Knowledge</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Party ID</th>
<th>Trust in Ohio Govt.</th>
<th>Approval of Existing Funding Sys.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar DS &amp; SS</td>
<td>.086 (-.036, .200)</td>
<td>.158 (.068, .246)</td>
<td>-.091 (.153, -.030)</td>
<td>.031 (.004, .065)</td>
<td>.064 (-.100, .228)</td>
<td>.084 (-.004, .172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More DS than SS</td>
<td>.27 (-.08, .145)</td>
<td>.101 (.018, .186)</td>
<td>.069 (.008, .132)</td>
<td>.026 (.007, .057)</td>
<td>.110 (-.051, .271)</td>
<td>.124 (.043, .207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than DS</td>
<td>-.113 (-.121, -.106)</td>
<td>-.259 (-.266, -.250)</td>
<td>.022 (.017, .027)</td>
<td>-.056 (-.059, -.052)</td>
<td>-.174 (-.180, -.166)</td>
<td>-.208 (-.216, -.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exp. Only</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar DS &amp; SS</td>
<td>.097 (-.038, .22)</td>
<td>.143 (.044, .241)</td>
<td>-.098 (-.166, -.030)</td>
<td>.023 (.015, .063)</td>
<td>.041 (-.140, .225)</td>
<td>.076 (-.022, .173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More DS than SS</td>
<td>.004 (-.113, .134)</td>
<td>.114 (.021, .207)</td>
<td>.069 (.002, .139)</td>
<td>.028 (.008, .064)</td>
<td>.150 (-.030, .328)</td>
<td>.148 (.058, .239)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than DS</td>
<td>-.101% (-.111, -.094)</td>
<td>-.258 (-.265, -.247)</td>
<td>.029 (.023, .034)</td>
<td>-.052 (-.055, -.047)</td>
<td>-.191 (-.197, -.181)</td>
<td>-.224 (-.232, -.210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Only</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar DS &amp; SS</td>
<td>.158 (-.192, .395)</td>
<td>.259 (.065, .457)</td>
<td>-.079 (-.214, -.040)</td>
<td>.092 (.030, .163)</td>
<td>.311 (.009, .582)</td>
<td>.046 (-.113, .223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More DS than SS</td>
<td>.152 (-.005, .479)</td>
<td>-.047 (-.241, -.078)</td>
<td>.089 (.005, .231)</td>
<td>-.013 (.079, .030)</td>
<td>-.064 (-.354, .164)</td>
<td>-.020 (-.174, .091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than DS</td>
<td>-.311 (-.393, -.231)</td>
<td>-.212 (-.290, -.121)</td>
<td>-.10 (-.047, -.031)</td>
<td>-.078 (-.103, -.050)</td>
<td>-.247 (-.349, -.137)</td>
<td>-.026 (-.090, .040)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on N = 793 for full sample, N = 683 for experimental-only subgroup, and N = 110 for control group. For each estimate, all other variables are set to their median values. Minimum and maximum values for 95 percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. Estimates were calculated with version 2.0 of the CLARIFY program (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2001), using 10,000 simulations.

4 Education and political knowledge were manipulated from their minimum values to their maximum values as part of this analysis. Gender was manipulated from its minimum of 0=female to its maximum of 1=male; Race was manipulated from its minimum value of 0=not black to its maximum value of 1=black; Party ID was manipulated from 1=Democrat, to 2=Republican; Approval of the state legislature was manipulated from 1=strongly approve to 5=strongly disapprove, and trust in Ohio’s state government was manipulated from 1=always to 4=never.
Education caused the biggest change in probabilities for the full sample, with the likelihood of expressing more specific support than diffuse support decreasing by almost 26 percentage points as education changed from low levels of educational attainment to high levels. In keeping with Zaller’s framework and my theoretical expectations, political knowledge also had a significant impact on the patterns of support expressed by respondents, with respondents with high levels of knowledge being 11 percentage points less likely to express more specific support than diffuse support. Party identification also had a moderate influence, with Democrats in the sample being almost six percentage points less likely than Republicans to express more specific than diffuse support. Finally, as trust in Ohio’s government was manipulated from a high level to a low level, respondents were 17 percentage points less likely to express more specific than diffuse support and 11 percentage points more likely to express higher levels of diffuse support than specific support.

The same pattern of results also held (as I would expect) for respondents in the experimental subgroup. The same pattern generally held for the control group, with respondents again being less likely to express higher levels of specific than diffuse support as each variable was manipulated from its low value to its high value. However, one curious difference emerged for the control group as the variables changed from low to high values—in all but one case, respondents who moved out of the specific>diffuse category moved into the similarity category. In the full sample and the experimental subsample, the movement away from the specific>diffuse category in most cases was distributed more evenly across the other two categories. Although my theoretical framework does not provide an explanation for this finding, the results provide further
evidence that my framing experiment appeared to have a differential influence on respondents in my sample. It also highlights the complex etiology of support for the Ohio Supreme Court and argues for a conception of support that varies substantially across different subsets of the general population.

**Similarity in Judgments of Specific Support and Support for the Decision in the 2000 DeRolph v. State Case**

Because my dataset included a traditional measure of specific support along with a measure of specific support for the court’s decision in the school funding case, I also looked at patterns of specific support held by respondents in my sample. Table 6.9 (above) shows that respondents in my sample held one of three patterns of specific support: similar judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision, higher specific support than support for the decision, and higher support for the decision than specific support. As before, I used multinomial logit analysis as my estimation technique, and I estimated separate models for my full sample and for my experimental and control subgroups.

My models for included the predictor variables listed above and my dependent variable was the new three category variable I computed which measured the pattern of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case that was expressed by each respondent. Although I included the same predictor variables, I developed theoretical expectations that were tailored to the question of similarity of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the 2000 DeRolph v. State case. I included gender, party identification, age, income, and trust in Ohio’s government as
control variables. As before, this meant that although I expected that they would display a relationship to similarity in respondents’ judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case, the expected direction of any influence was not clear.

I had more specific expectations about other variables included in this set of models. I expected that race would have a significant relationship to similarity. More specifically, I expected that African-American respondents would express high levels of support for the court’s decision in the school funding case as the decision was intended to ameliorate funding disparities that disproportionately affected poor urban school districts. As such, I expected that race would be related to respondents holding a dissimilar pattern of support in which they expressed higher levels of support for the court’s decision in the school funding case than specific support.

My expectations for educational attainment were very similar. Generally, I expected that educational attainment would display a significant relationship to similarity in judgments of diffuse and specific support. More specifically, I hypothesized that more highly educated respondents would be more likely than other respondents to value education and thus, would see the court’s decision in the 2000 school funding case as beneficial toward education, and thus, especially positive. As such, I expected that high levels of education would be associated with expressing a dissimilar pattern of support in which support for the court’s decision in the school funding case would be higher than specific support.
I also included political knowledge in the model that follows below. Once again, I expected that political knowledge would be significantly related to similarity in judgments on this pair of measures. I expected that low knowledge respondents would be aware of the court’s decision in the school funding case, and that they would know much less about other specific decisions made by the Ohio Supreme Court. As a result of this asymmetrical knowledge, I expected that low-knowledge respondents would express dissimilar judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. I hypothesized that these respondents would evaluate the court’s decision in the school funding case more positively than they would evaluate the court’s outputs in general.

As before, I included measures of support for Ohio’s state legislature and Ohio’s Governor in my model. Because the Governor and the state legislature designed the funding system that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down in 2000, I expected that support for the Governor and/or state legislature would result in dissimilar judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. I expected that respondents who supported the Governor and state legislature would be dissatisfied with the court’s decision in the school funding case, and thus, that they would express higher levels of generalized specific support than support for the court’s decision in the school funding case.
Finally, I included a variable measuring approval of the then-existing funding system in my model. I expected that respondents who approved of the then-existing funding system would express a dissimilar pattern of support that was characterized by less support for the court’s decision in the school funding case than specific support. Table 6.13 shows the results of my model of patterns of specific support. For the purposes of the logit equations in Table 6.13, I used similarity on my measures of specific support as my base category and each equation compares the category indicated with the base category.

Compared to respondents in the full sample who expressed similar judgments of specific support, both age and educational attainment increased the likelihood of respondents expressing more specific support than support for the Ohio Supreme Court’s decision in the school funding case. That is, compared to respondents who expressed similar judgments on my two measures of specific support, respondents who had lower levels of education and who were younger had an increased likelihood of expressing more specific support for the court than support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. This finding for education was opposite of my theoretical expectation. In contrast, gender was the only significant predictor of expressing more support for the court’s decision in the school funding case than specific support for the court. This finding for my full sample reinforces my conclusion that the demographic and attitudinal profiles of respondents differed substantially across my three categories of support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Full Sample (n=793)</th>
<th>Exp. Only (n=683)</th>
<th>Control (n=110)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SS &gt; than Support for Decision</td>
<td>SS &gt; than Support for Decision</td>
<td>SS &gt; than Support for Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coeff.</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>Coeff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>(.21)</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>(.33)</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educ.</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of State Legis.</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>(.21)</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Governor</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>(.22)</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Govt.</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App. of Funding System</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>(1.17)</td>
<td>-.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarity is the base category. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels are based on two-tailed tests. Gender coded such that 0=female, 1=male; Race coded such that 0=not black, 1=black; Party ID coded such that 1=Democrat, 2=Republican, 3=Independent; Approval of legislature and funding system coded such that 1=strongly approve, 5=strongly disapprove; Trust coded so that 1=always and 4=never.

Table 6.13: Effects of Demographic and Attitudinal Variables on Patterns of Specific Support and Support for the Court’s Decision in the School Funding Case

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The results were slightly different for the subgroup of respondents who were randomly assigned to an experimental condition. Gender again emerged as a significant predictor of holding a non-similar pattern of support, but unlike the results for the experimental group, gender was significant in both directions. That is, compared to experimental group respondents who expressed similar levels of specific support, experimental group respondents who were female were more likely to express either of the non-similar patterns of specific support. Educational attainment and age also were significant predictors again of respondents in the experimental subgroup expressing more specific support than support for the court’s decision. Finally, income also was a significant predictor for the experimental subgroup of expressing more specific support than support for the school funding decision. Compared to respondents who expressed similar judgments on my measures of specific support, respondents with lower levels of income tended to express higher levels of specific support than support for the court’s decision in the school funding case.

Consistent with the results for my comparisons of diffuse and specific support above, Table 6.13 shows that the predictors of falling into either of the dissimilar categories once again were very different for control group respondents. The table demonstrates that compared to control group respondents who expressed similar levels of specific support, approval of Ohio’s governor and approval of the existing school funding system were the only predictors of expressing more specific support for the court than support for the court’s decision in the school funding case. For these respondents, disapproval of Governor Bob Taft and approval of the existing funding system made it more likely that respondents would express higher levels of specific support for the court
than support for the court’s decision in the school funding case and less likely that they would express similarity in their judgments of support. Both of these findings are consistent with my theoretical expectations.

Finally, compared to control group respondents who expressed similar judgments of specific support and support for the court’s decision in the school funding case, political knowledge was the only significant predictor of expressing more support for the court’s decision in the school funding case than specific support for the court, a result that confirms my theoretical expectation about the influence of political knowledge on patterns of specific support.

In order to clarify the influence of each of the significant predictor variables on patterns of specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I again computed estimated probabilities of respondents expressing each pattern of support in which I systematically manipulated the values of each of the significant predictor variables from their minimum values to their maximum values, while holding the other predictor variables to their medians. These estimates provide more detailed information on the magnitude of influence of each of the independent variables that were significant predictors of the pattern of specific support expressed by respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Knowledge</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Party ID</th>
<th>Approval of Governor</th>
<th>Approval of Funding System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar SS and Support for Decision</td>
<td>.018 (-.095, .123)</td>
<td>.066 (-.024, .157)</td>
<td>.077 (.023, .129)</td>
<td>.003 (-.030, .036)</td>
<td>-.179 (-.324, -.008)</td>
<td>.003 (-.082, .089)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than Support for Decision</td>
<td>.073 (-.034, .196)</td>
<td>-.113 (-.215, -.017)</td>
<td>-.031 (-.082, .023)</td>
<td>-.007 (-.4.3, 2.6)</td>
<td>.110 (-.063, .255)</td>
<td>-.043 (-.133, .044)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Support for Decision than SS</td>
<td>-.091 (-.103, -.085)</td>
<td>.047 (.038, .061)</td>
<td>-.046 (-.049, -.042)</td>
<td>.004 (.003, .007)</td>
<td>.069 (.053, .085)</td>
<td>.040 (.035, .046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Only</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar SS and Support for Decision</td>
<td>-.012 (-.131, .101)</td>
<td>.079 (-.021, .178)</td>
<td>.085 (.026, .141)</td>
<td>-.008 (-.043, .029)</td>
<td>-.144 (-.318, .066)</td>
<td>.002 (-.089, .095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than Support for Decision</td>
<td>.068 (-.048, .199)</td>
<td>-.135 (-.248, -.027)</td>
<td>-.039 (-.095, .020)</td>
<td>.001 (-.040, .034)</td>
<td>.042 (-.180, .216)</td>
<td>-.004 (-.090, .088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Support for Decision than SS</td>
<td>-.056 (-.069, -.049)</td>
<td>.056 (.045, .072)</td>
<td>-.046 (-.050, -.042)</td>
<td>.009 (.007, .012)</td>
<td>.102 (.088, .119)</td>
<td>.002 (-.002, .008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Only</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar SS and Support for Decision</td>
<td>.159 (-.236, .470)</td>
<td>.035 (-.217, .307)</td>
<td>.016 (-.143, .168)</td>
<td>.067 (-.025, .168)</td>
<td>-.290 (-.614, .092)</td>
<td>.128 (-.168, .387)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More SS than Support for Decision</td>
<td>.216 (-.123, .670)</td>
<td>-.075 (-.436, .226)</td>
<td>.024 (-.152, .213)</td>
<td>-.049 (-.195, .062)</td>
<td>.383 (-.033, .788)</td>
<td>-.419 (-.728, .081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Support for Decision than SS</td>
<td>-.375 (-.439, -.317)</td>
<td>.040 (-.022, .136)</td>
<td>-.040 (-.073, -.004)</td>
<td>-.018 (-.043, .034)</td>
<td>-.093 (-.210, .006)</td>
<td>.290 (.230, .357)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on N =793 for full sample, N=683 for experimental subgroup, and N=110 for control group. For each estimate, all other variables are set to their median values. Minimum and maximum values for 95 percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. Estimates were calculated with version 2.0 of the CLARIFY program (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2001), using 10,000 simulations.

Table 6.14: Estimated Changes in Probabilities of Expressing Three Patterns of Support As Predictor Variables Change from Minimum to Maximum Values

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5 Education and political knowledge were manipulated from their minimum values to their maximum values as part of this analysis. Gender was manipulated from its minimum of 0=female to its maximum of 1=male; Race was manipulated from its minimum value of 0=not black to its maximum value of 1=black; Party ID was manipulated from 1=Democrat, to 2=Republican; Approval of the state legislature and approval of Governor Bob Taft were manipulated from minimums of 1=strongly approve to maximums of 5=strongly disapprove.
Table 6.14 (below) displays these estimates. As before, I have presented results for my full sample and for the same two subsamples of respondents. The point estimates reported below are estimated average changes in probabilities of expressing each pattern of support; wide confidence intervals for some of the estimates (especially those with the control subgroup) mean that some of the estimates must be interpreted with caution. Moreover, I have converted the probabilities contained in Table 6.14 into percentages in my discussion in order to make the interpretation of the findings more straightforward.

In general, Table 6.14 demonstrates that manipulating the values of significant independent variables produced changes in probabilities for respondents’ patterns of specific support that were much less consistent than those seen in Table 6.12 for patterns of diffuse and specific support. For the full sample, approval of Governor Bob Taft caused the biggest change in probabilities, with the likelihood of respondents expressing similar levels of specific support and support for the court’s school funding decision decreasing by almost 18 percentage points as approval changed from strongly disapprove to strongly approve. Education had the second largest influence on the probabilities, with the likelihood of expressing more specific support than support for the court’s decision decreasing by 11 percentage points as education was manipulated from low levels to high. In keeping with Zaller’s framework, political knowledge again had a significant impact on the patterns of support expressed by respondents, with respondents with high levels of knowledge being 9 percentage points less likely to express more support for the decision than specific support.
Gender also had a moderate influence on the patterns of specific support expressed by respondents, with male respondents in the full sample being almost eight percentage points more likely to express similar levels of specific support and support for the decision than females.

Although the same pattern of results held in most cases for respondents in the experimental subgroup, results for the control group were very different and merit discussion. First, Table 6.14 shows that manipulating each of the values of the significant predictor variables generally produced more substantial changes in the patterns of specific support expressed by control group respondents than was seen with the full sample and with the experimental subgroup. For example, as approval of the existing funding system changed from its minimum of strongly approve to its maximum of strongly disapprove, respondents in the control group were almost 42 percent less likely to express more specific support for the court than support for the court’s decision in the funding case. However, in keeping with my theoretical expectations, control group respondents were 29 percent more likely to express more support for the court’s decision than specific support as approval of the existing school funding system changed from strongly approve to strongly disapprove. Approval of Governor Bob Taft had the second strongest influence on the patterns of support expressed by control group respondents, with levels of support for the court’s decision in the school funding case appearing to have an inverse relationship to approval of Governor Taft. That is, as approval of Governor Taft increased, respondents were 9 percent less likely to express more support for the decision than specific support, 29 percent less likely to express similar judgments of specific support, but 38 percent more likely to express a pattern of support in which
respondent’s level of generalized specific support was greater than the level of support for the court’s decision in the funding case. Simply, these results show that as approval of Governor Taft increased, support for the court’s decision in the school funding case decreased.

Finally, in keeping with Zaller’s framework, Table 6.14 shows that as political knowledge increased, control group respondents were almost 38 percent less likely to express higher levels of support for the court’s decision in the funding case than generalized specific support for the court. I speculate that this change is due to high-knowledge respondents basing their judgments of specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court on a wider range of outputs and decisions by the court, not just on the school funding case (as I would expect for low-knowledge respondents).

Although the results presented in Tables 6.11 through 6.13 provided limited evidence that my survey-based experiment did influence patterns of support expressed by respondents, the results in Table 6.14 provide stronger evidence that my framing statements appeared to have a substantial and systematic influence on the patterns of specific support and support for the court’s decision that were expressed by a variety of subgroups in my sample. Although I was unable in chapter 5 to demonstrate that my experiment influenced levels of support in any sort of meaningful or systematic way, the findings presented above in Tables 6.11 through 6.14 lead me to suspect that my experiment had a substantial differential influence on patterns of diffuse support, specific support and support for the court’s decision expressed by respondents. From Table 6.14, it appears that the framing statements reduced the influence of specific predictor variables (such as political knowledge and approval of the existing funding system) on patterns of
support expressed by respondents in the experimental subgroup. However, a small sample size in my control group means that any conclusions of this sort must remain tentative. Even so I argue that the bottom line from these analyses is that my framing experiment appeared to influence patterns of support expressed by respondents in my sample, not actual levels of support or direct correlates of support.

**Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed the data from my survey-based experiment in a cross-sectional sense and attempted to investigate the structure of support for the Ohio Supreme Court in more detail than previous chapters allowed. Specifically, I focused on looking at interrelationships between my three measures of support and also at looking at and explaining patterns of support among respondents in my sample. This chapter added to our understanding of support for courts by looking at a new measure of support (support for the Ohio Supreme Court’s decision in a single, high-profile case) and by going beyond basic descriptive analyses to look at how support varies across subgroups of respondents in my sample. In doing so, this chapter focused on the concept of relative levels of support across subgroups in a larger population.

I found generally strong positive associations between my measures of support, with those associations being strongest and most consistent for high-knowledge respondents and weakest for low-knowledge respondents. I found that respondents who held different patterns of diffuse and specific support had different attitudinal and demographic characteristics, and that changes in one or more demographic or attitudinal variables could have a substantial influence on the pattern of support expressed by
respondents. As noted above, the findings of significant differences between my control and experimental subgroups also demonstrated that although my framing experiment did not seem to have a systematic influence on absolute levels of support expressed by respondents, it did seem to have a significant influence on the patterns of support expressed across my three types of support.

Chapter 7 is a concluding chapter. As such, it reviews the findings of my dissertation and the theoretical and practical implications of my findings. It also highlights many possibilities and directions for future research on the question of public support for courts.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The research presented in my dissertation suggests that overall levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court are generally high and stable across the two datasets I examined. More importantly, my dissertation found that elite messages could influence support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and that respondents in my sample varied in the amounts of diffuse support, specific support, and support for the court’s decision in the 2001 school funding case that they expressed. I used computer simulations to complement and extend these results and found that changes in single predictors of support can have a substantial influence on the levels of support expressed by respondents. Taken together, these findings indicate that for most Ohioans, the Ohio Supreme Court appears to enjoy a significant and stable reservoir of diffuse support—a reservoir that in my data seemed largely untouched by disapproval with the court’s role in the school funding controversy.

These conclusions are based on a two-part design that included a traditional, descriptive analysis of cross-sectional survey data, along with a more involved analysis of data from the unique survey-based experiment I created. My ability to collect new data on two representative surveys of Ohio residents helps to ameliorate one of the common limitations of much of the previous research on support for courts—namely, that data on public support for courts often was obtained from surveys that were not
specifically designed to measure support in a rigorous and theory-driven manner. As I argued in chapter 2, at least some of the wide variance in the findings in the previous literature can be attributed to scholars having to use suboptimal measures in their research. Chapter 2 also highlighted the fact that although the body of literature on support for courts is substantial when taken as a whole, previous work focuses disproportionately on the U.S. Supreme Court, leaving many research questions on support yet unanswered for state and local courts.

Aside from the significant data constraints faced by scholars, research on support for courts also has been hampered by the lack of a workable and realistic theory of support for courts. Simply, although the work of Easton was successful in differentiating various concepts of support and the implications of each for a political institution, little theoretical work informs the questions of why citizens support courts or of why levels of support for courts can change over time and in response to salient political events. This lack of theoretical grounding has constrained many scholars’ ability to create workable theoretical explanations for their findings. This is not an indictment of the entire body of research, as much of the more recent scholarship on support for courts has attempted to put findings about support for courts into a theoretical perspective. Recently published analyses by Gibson, Caldeira and Spence (2003a, 2003b) are two of the most notable examples of recent analyses that have used existing theories of support effectively, both to guide their research design and to interpret their results. Even so, the use of theory to guide the interpretation of results about support for courts remains a significant weakness in this body of scholarship.
A lack of a truly workable and realistic theory of support for courts also has had one additional consequence. The absence of theory to guide how scholars conceptualize and operationalize support for courts has resulted in scholars using a fairly wide variety of measures and conceptualizations of support for courts. One significant cost of the lack of theoretical guidance in this area has been fragmentation, in that many of the findings from individual analyses are not comparable to other similar analyses due to wide differences in the measures used. The development and acceptance of a theory to guide the analytical choices made by scholars would facilitate the creation of a synthesis of scholarly knowledge about support for courts.

Not surprisingly, I was unable to completely remedy all of these defects in my work. However, I used the work of Zaller (1992) in chapter 3 to describe the underlying psychological processes behind judgments of support of courts expressed by citizens. Doing so allowed me to construct a plausible explanation of how citizens form judgments of support for courts, and of how and why levels of support expressed by citizens for courts may change—both over time and in response to salient new political events. However, I also drew on the work of Easton to guide my conceptual and operational definitions of support, and his framework also informed many of the hypotheses and expectations that structured my analyses. Using both of these frameworks in a complementary manner contributes to the existing work on support for courts by allowing me to address a wider range of theoretical questions in a more rigorous and complete manner than in much of the previous literature.
Because few scholars have studied levels of support for state supreme courts, and no scholar to my knowledge has focused on support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I used new data in chapter 4 to describe and explain levels of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Data for this analysis came from a representative sample of Ohio residents collected in February 2002. Because many of the previous analyses of support for state and local courts relied on general measures of confidence in the court in question, I developed new, conceptually precise measures of diffuse and specific support that mirrored what Gibson and Caldeira (1992, 2003) used successfully to measure support for the U.S. Supreme Court. My analysis found that the Ohio Supreme Court enjoyed generally high levels of diffuse and specific support. In order to explain these findings, I created a multivariate model that was designed to measure the correlates of diffuse support. In keeping with the research of Segal (1995), I included specific support as an independent variable in my model and found that it had a strong and significant positive association with diffuse support. I also found that being male, having higher levels of education, not being politically liberal, and not having children predicted more diffuse support for the court. These initial findings provided a baseline in which to interpret the more detailed results from my survey-based experiment.

Unlike the work of many other scholars studying support for state and local courts, I set out in the remainder of my dissertation to test whether elite messages could function as one source of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court. To do this, I created a unique survey-based experiment in chapter 5 that was designed to determine whether elite messages could influence the levels of support respondents expressed for the Ohio Supreme Court. My survey-based experiment was fielded in July,
2001, as the Ohio Supreme Court was in the process of reviewing the state’s revised funding system, thereby allowing me to capitalize on the high salience of the court as a natural experiment. The chapter described the experiment and the rich survey data that accompanied it in great detail and provided information on how the dependent variable was created. It also drew on Easton’s and Zaller’s theoretical frameworks to develop a set of expectations that guided both my analyses and the interpretation of my results. This design allowed me to go beyond the simple descriptive and explanatory analyses presented in chapter 4 and probe one source of diffuse and specific support for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Even though my experiment was innovative and carefully designed, the analyses in chapter 5 made it clear that the experiment did not work as I expected. Consistent with my theoretical expectations, I found that elite messages, as operationalized in my experimental treatments, had a significant influence on levels of diffuse support expressed by respondents for the Ohio Supreme Court. Also in keeping with my expectations was my finding that the influence of elite messages was mediated by political knowledge, with respondents who had moderate levels of political knowledge demonstrating the highest degree of influence from the elite messages, and respondents with low high levels of knowledge being less likely to be influenced by the elite messages. By confirming that elite messages were significantly related to support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I demonstrated the possibility that support for the court may change as a result of elite discourse about the court’s policy outputs. However, any time the experimental treatments were influential, they increased support for the Ohio Supreme Court, regardless of the valence of the treatment. Adding control variables to my models
produced no significant changes in my results, and an extensive series of diagnostic analyses failed to provide any plausible explanation for my anomalous findings. I then looked more closely at my framing statements. When I drafted the statements, I focused them on both the Ohio Supreme Court and on Ohio’s state legislature in order to better capture the complex nature of the school funding controversy (see Appendix C for wording of the framing statements). I hypothesized that my references to Ohio’s state legislature shifted the focus of the statements away from the Ohio Supreme Court and towards the state legislature. I tested this hypothesis rigorously but found that the influence of my framing statements again was uniformly positive. This left me with the simple conclusion that my experiment did not work as I expected, and I see these findings as a reflection on my experimental design, not on the utility of Zaller’s one message and two message models of elite-mass communication for explaining support for courts.

In the absence of resources to collect additional data, I was unable to probe the influence of elite messages on support for the Ohio Supreme Court further. Because my experimental treatments appeared to have a uniformly positive influence on levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, in chapter 6 I analyzed the data from my survey-based experiment in a cross-sectional manner to look at patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. My goal with the chapter was to determine who in my sample expressed similar and non-similar levels of support on my three measures of support. In one sense, this type of analysis is new, in that scholars typically have not focused on patterns of support for courts in their recent research. However, as I noted in the chapter, this type of research builds directly on the seminal work of Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968). Consistent with my expectations, I found that my three measures of support displayed
significant positive associations, with those associations being strongest for high
knowledge respondents and weakest for low-knowledge respondents. In no case did the
association between two of the measures account for a majority of the variance, thus
supporting Easton’s argument that specific support, diffuse support, and support for
specific decisions are theoretically distinct concepts.

The chapter also demonstrated that a substantial proportion of my sample
expressed similar judgments of support across my three measures of support.
Multivariate analyses showed that respondents in my sample who expressed similar
judgments of support had different attitudinal and demographic characteristics than those
who expressed any of the non-similar judgments of support. I then used computer
simulations to determine the magnitude of influence of each of the significant variables
on patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Quite surprisingly, the simulations
showed that substantial changes in individual independent variables could have a large
influence on patterns of support expressed by respondents. These results provide
evidence that the magnitude of the significant effects I found in many cases was both
noteworthy and meaningful.

However, the results of this chapter should be interpreted with some caution.
Analyzing patterns of support for the Ohio Supreme Court required me to reduce each of
my continuous measures of support to a new three category variable that captured
whether the respondent’s level of support on that measure of support was high, medium,
or low. Although I used Easton’s and Zaller’s theoretical frameworks to guide the
creation of these new variables and the interpretation of my results, neither framework
was able to answer all of the practical analytical questions posed by this type of analysis.
As a result, my task of analyzing patterns of support required me to make a number of significant analytical decisions without theoretical guidance. I attempted to develop pragmatic and plausible solutions; however, other scholars may have different viewpoints, and consequently, might have made different analytical decisions. I recognize that the lack of theoretical guidance to many of the questions posed by chapter 6 is a problem. I also acknowledge that different analytical decisions would be likely to lead to different results. In that sense, the research presented in the chapter should be regarded as exploratory in nature; however, the chapter was quite successful in demonstrating that analyzing patterns of support expressed across respondents adds new information to our understanding of support for courts.

Although many of my findings contribute significantly to the established body of scholarly work on support for courts, the research presented in my dissertation must be considered preliminary in nature. I looked at support for a court not often studied by political scientists and students of public opinion, I used a combination of survey data and data from a unique survey-based experiment, and I looked at both the standard concepts of diffuse and specific support, along with a newer concept of support for a specific, high-profile decision. My use of the latter measure of support, and my exploration of its relationship to the traditional measures of diffuse and specific support, is one indication that my research had a broader conceptual focus than much of the existing literature on support for courts. Because of the exploratory nature of my research, I cautiously present a few theoretical and practical implications of my research below. I also present more extensive thoughts about directions for future research on support for courts.
Implications and Further Research

The chapter to this point has provided a brief overview of the methodology and findings of my dissertation. At this point, the chapter uses my findings to outline a number of implications from my research. It also highlights areas where additional research is needed. As noted above, my research found that support for the Ohio Supreme Court is complex. Although levels of diffuse and specific support appeared on first glance to be generally high, similar, and straightforward to understand for respondents in my sample, the multivariate analyses presented in my dissertation demonstrated that political knowledge conditioned the levels of support expressed by respondents, with high knowledge respondents appearing to have somewhat different opinion formation and change processes from low-knowledge respondents. Moreover, a variety of demographic and attitudinal variables emerged throughout my dissertation as significant predictors of support, thus providing evidence that support varies along a number of other dimensions as well. When taken together, these findings argue that scholars looking at levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court (and arguably, courts in general) should go beyond conducting simple descriptive analyses and also conduct detailed multivariate analyses that are capable of identifying demographic and attitudinal variations in levels of support across respondents.

Aside from highlighting cleavages in absolute levels of support for the Ohio Supreme Court, my dissertation also has demonstrated that respondents in my sample expressed varying amounts of diffuse support, specific support, and support for the court’s decision in the 2001 school funding case. My research found that although these differences could be categorized into a small number of different patterns of support,
intra-respondent variation across my three types of support was substantial. Furthermore, the multivariate analyses in chapter 6 showed that the patterns of support expressed by respondents also varied substantially along a number of demographic and attitudinal variables. In more than one case, the computer simulations I ran demonstrated that changing the value of a single significant predictor variable could have a substantial impact on the likelihood of a respondent expressing a particular pattern of support. As noted above, few analyses have looked at this type of variation, preferring instead to focus only on levels of support expressed by respondents. My research demonstrates that looking at patterns of support and intra-respondent variations across my measures of support provided new information about the structure of support for the Ohio Supreme Court. Concomitantly, these findings argue that research that seeks to both describe and explain support for a court must go beyond the types of analyses typically included in scholarly work and also include descriptive and multivariate analyses of the patterns of support held by respondents.

The surprisingly complex nature of support for the Ohio Supreme Court also has substantial methodological implications for scholars. In this dissertation I attempted to create a survey-based experiment that accurately reflected some of the elite messages that ordinary Ohioans were likely to hear during the school funding controversy. Doing so was difficult; after all, from the perspective of an ordinary Ohioan, the school funding controversy was enormously complicated; it involved state party leaders, educators, state budget officials, the state supreme court, the Governor, the state legislature, the media, and a variety of interest groups who lobbied both the political institutions and the public at large to accept particular solutions to the crisis. No telephone-based survey experiment
can include all of these influences, and practical and funding constraints required me to develop my treatment messages quickly and to simplify each treatment message substantially. As described in more detail in chapter 5, I attribute the anomalous findings from my experiment at least in part to an experimental design that ended up being oversimplified. This result, however, can be considered an example of some of the practical, but unforeseen, consequences that can result in applied research. These consequences limited the utility of my survey-based experiment, even though I worked within my available time and funding constraints to design treatments that would be realistic and effective.

The simple conclusion I draw from this unsatisfying aspect of my research is that a complex research design is needed when studying a complex subject area. In my case, I could not capture the interaction of elite messages appropriately with my design, and my research suffered as a result. To adequately understand the dynamics of support for courts, my research (and its limitations) provides clear confirmation that scholars first need to use a theoretical framework to identify the relevant influences on support for the court being studied, and then create a research design that is capable of measuring those influences in a realistic and non-reactive manner. Moreover, from a methodological standpoint, the limitations of my research support the need for a multi-mode data collection strategy that includes surveys, survey-based experiments, and laboratory experiments. Regardless of whether a multi-mode approach is actually employed, laboratory experiments are critically important. Simply, the ability to use a laboratory experiment to create a controlled environment in most cases makes experiments the single best currently available research technique to sort out the independent influences
of the many attitudinal, demographic, and environmental influences of support for courts. Thus, the major methodological implication of my research is that support for the Ohio Supreme Court (and arguably, courts in general) is more complicated and multi-faceted than typically assumed by scholars working in this area. My dissertation provides clear evidence of the need to have a research design that is equally complex and nuanced.

Related to this, it must be acknowledged that my research design does not provide a full test of Zaller’s framework or of his one-message and two message models of elite-mass communication. Chapter 3 noted that Zaller posits that two mechanisms—receipt and acceptance—drive opinion formation and change processes. My research design was only able to measure the effects of acceptance because everyone in my sample—regardless of the condition they were assigned to—received information about the Ohio Supreme Court and its actions in the school funding case. In that sense, the fact that my research did not provide full confirmation of the utility of Zaller’s framework for explaining support for court is not a negative outcome. Even though my research design was imperfect, testing only half of Zaller’s model provided some confirmation that his framework has construct validity and serves as one indication that a rigorous full test of his model could provide support for other aspects of the framework that my dissertation was unable to test.

One important area for future research involves replicating my study with better designed framing statements. I expect that designing new framing statements that are focused directly on the court will permit a more complete and rigorous test of Zaller’s one message and two message models. Pursuing this avenue of research, however, presents a significant number of complications. The first is funding, in that substantial
resources would be needed to field the revised framing statements in a representative statewide telephone survey. In the absence of additional resources, using a laboratory experiment may be a good alternative. However, doing so would severely limit the generalizability of any findings. A second challenge is context, in that my research design relies on a natural experiment that was generated by a single high salience case that generated a substantial amount of elite discourse. The types of cases occur infrequently, making a replication and improvement of my research a long-term project if the Ohio Supreme Court remains the sole unit of analysis. Broadening the scope of research to include the U.S. Supreme Court or any other state supreme court likely would facilitate this type of project.

At this point, my discussion of the implications of my research has focused primarily on issues related to research design and research methodology. The discussion now turns to practical and theoretical implications of my research. One such implication of my findings deals with the nature of mass opinions toward the Ohio Supreme Court. As noted previously, the Ohio Supreme Court typically has a very low level of salience to Ohioans. Many of the decisions made by the court, while important, do not have a direct influence on the daily lives of most Ohioans. This characteristic of the institution could lead to concerns that the low salience of the Ohio Supreme Court means that opinions toward the court are little more than random, Conversian “non-attitudes.” My research provides evidence that support for the court did appear to have enough coherence and structure during the school funding controversy to be measured systematically. Among the evidence is my finding that political knowledge conditioned the levels of support expressed by respondents in ways that were exactly predicted by Zaller’s framework.
Moreover, demographic variables that previous research and theory identified as predictors of support in many cases emerged in my analyses as significant predictors of support. My three measures of support also displayed the positive relationship that Easton’s theoretical framework and previous research on support for courts led me to expect.

However, my research also demonstrates that the structure of support for the Ohio Supreme Court has limitations. After all, my research found that levels of support were significantly influenced by a weak framing manipulation that was focused as much on the Ohio legislature as on the Ohio Supreme Court. That result, however, is consistent with Zaller’s theoretical argument that respondents’ banks of considerations about low-salience political institutions will be smaller and less organized than the banks for high-salience national institutions. It also should be noted that the high-salience nature of the school funding controversy effectively makes my research a “most likely” cases scenario for structure. That is, during the time I fielded both of my surveys, the Ohio Supreme Court received a high degree of attention from political elites, and as a result we can expect that during this time period respondents’ banks of considerations grew both in size and organization. Although looking at the structure of opinions toward the Ohio Supreme Court during a “normal” time is beyond the scope of this research, it is a good topic for further investigation in the future.

My research has significant implications for the development of a theory of support for courts. Whatever the advantages of using the work of Easton and Zaller together in order to create an improved, “hybrid” theoretical framework, my dissertation demonstrates that the combined framework still has significant limitations when applied
to the study of support for courts. One such limitation deals with the relationship between diffuse and specific support. Easton posited that changes in levels of specific support for the U.S. Supreme Court over time could lead to changes in diffuse support for the Court. More recent research by Segal came to a different conclusion, finding that the relationship between specific and diffuse support operated in both directions. Although this research question has yet to be answered conclusively for the U.S. Supreme Court, virtually no research examines the relationship between these types of support for state and local courts. Substantial institutional and contextual differences between the U.S. Supreme Court and lower courts may mean that the relationship between diffuse and specific support operates quite differently for state and local courts. A well-developed theory is the best the starting point for an investigation of this sort, and a significant weakness of my hybrid framework is that it does not speak directly to the question of how diffuse and specific support are related for lower courts.

Another facet of this question involves the mechanism by which support for a specific decision can influence overall levels of diffuse and specific support. This is the one area in which my hybrid framework provides contradictory answers. Easton posits that specific support for a single decision matters only to the extent that it influences overall levels of specific support for a political institution, while Zaller’s framework argues that specific support for a single decision can have a direct and independent influence on both diffuse and specific support if support for the single decision is one of the considerations used by respondents to form their judgments of diffuse and specific support. This theoretical contradiction and the underlying relationships between the three types of support merit further research. I speculate that support for specific decisions
made by a court can influence both diffuse and specific support and that the relationship between specific and diffuse support involves concurrent influences of diffuse support on specific support and of specific support on diffuse support. However, research designed to address this question directly and to untangle these relationships (in both practical and theoretical senses) would be a substantial contribution to our knowledge about support for courts.

Of course, these arguments presume that the concepts of diffuse and specific support can be applied to the study of support for a state-level court. In this dissertation, my position has been that the concepts of diffuse and specific support are well suited for measuring support for the Ohio Supreme Court, and I believe that my findings provide support for that argument. However, many scholars have argued that jurisdictional and contextual differences between the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts make the concepts of diffuse and specific support inappropriate for state and local courts. Although I argue that the concepts of diffuse and specific support are appropriate for studying support for the Ohio Supreme Court, I acknowledge that there may be limitations to the applicability of these concepts to the study of support for other state supreme courts and especially to the study of support for local courts. Ultimately, these are theoretical questions and the fact my dissertation does not address them directly reveals another significant limitation of my hybrid framework.

In some respects the success I had using both concepts of support should not be surprising, since the U.S. Supreme Court and the Ohio Supreme Court have many institutional and jurisdictional characteristics in common. However, more research is needed to determine whether the concepts of diffuse and specific support can be applied
universally to the study of support for courts remains unanswered at this point. I see this as an important area of future research, in that our knowledge of the levels and correlates of support depends largely on the conceptualization and operationalization of support used by scholars. Although the fact that this question is yet unanswered reflects the need for a more comprehensive theory of support for courts, it also must be recognized that even with an adequate theory of support for courts, designing research that can address this question poses a significant number of practical challenges. After all, determining whether the concepts of diffuse and specific support can and should be applied to lower courts requires a research design that can control for differences in institutional characteristics, jurisdictions, appointment mechanisms, public salience, and external political contexts.

One of the advantages of incorporating Zaller’s framework into my theory of support for courts is that it articulates a plausible mechanism to explain changes in individual citizens’ expressions of support for courts. Recalling chapter 3, expressions of support are the product of a citizens averaging across the considerations they bring to mind when asked for their opinion. Changes in judgments of support can occur anytime the size or valence of a citizen’s bank of considerations changes, or when the mixture of available considerations changes.
Although the application of this mechanism to the study of support for courts in itself is a contribution, my hybrid theoretical framework unfortunately does not go much further than this. As a result, scholars still have little clear theoretical guidance on when they should expect changes in levels of support for courts. Ameliorating this weakness requires taking Zaller’s theoretical mechanism of opinion change and using it to develop substantive knowledge about when scholars should expect that single court decisions or the external environment can cause changes in levels of public support for courts.

This discussion to this point highlights the most critical area in which further research is needed—namely, the need for a more comprehensive and better developed theory of support for courts. In many respects, none of the research questions noted above can be addressed properly without first having a workable and comprehensive theory of support for courts. As noted previously, a truly comprehensive theoretical framework would explain the sources of support for courts, and how and why observed patterns of support change, both across subsets of the population and over time. Ideally, of course, such a framework also would be capable of accounting for institutional and environmental differences in support between various levels and types of courts. Easton’s framework has been sufficient to allow scholars to conduct basic descriptive and explanatory analyses on support for courts, but as noted above, many of the more involved research questions require more substantial theoretical guidance.
I have adopted one approach to creating a more comprehensive and realistic theoretical framework—namely, to combine Easton’s theory with the theoretical work of Zaller with the intention of creating a synergy between the two frameworks. Limits to my research design made it impossible to test this new framework, and in any case, my new framework by itself cannot address all of the criteria noted above. Many other approaches are possible, and I suspect that any such theory of support for courts will need to draw more explicitly on research done by social and organizational psychologists. However, my findings, the established body of research on support for courts, and the development of a theory of support for courts are likely to provide the basis for explaining support for the Ohio Supreme Court in greater detail and with a much higher level of certainty.

Finally, my research has significant practical political implications for the Ohio Supreme Court. The simple reality is that courts must have public support to function as effective policymakers. Theoretically, courts need both diffuse and specific support if they hope to engage in policymaking without backlash from citizens. Diffuse support is critical, because without support for the Ohio Supreme Court as an abstract, legitimate political institution, individual decisions could lead to attacks when it makes decisions that Ohioans view as unpopular. Simply, diffuse support creates a buffer of generalized goodwill from citizens, and allows a court to function with a certain degree of independence from the need to constantly balance its decisions with the desires of the public.
Although diffuse support helps ensure the ongoing stability of the political
system, specific support remains critically important. After all, a court that continually
makes unpopular decisions could exhaust its reservoir of diffuse support, and thus imperil
the institution’s ability to be effective and respected by the public.

My data show that the Ohio Supreme Court appears to have substantial reservoirs
of diffuse support and generalized specific support, even though many respondents in my
sample did not support the court’s decision in the school funding case. Judging from the
similarly high levels of diffuse and specific support in both of my datasets, it appears that
this decision by itself does not appear to have caused any significant damage to the
court’s legitimacy as an Ohio political institution. Even though the school funding case
has yet to be resolved conclusively, it appears that any rancor toward the Ohio Supreme
Court as a result of its decision in the 2001 case was fleeting, and that within reasonable
limits, the court can proceed with business as usual.
APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ABOUT THE FEBRUARY 2002 BUCKEYE STATE POLL
The results reported in chapter 4 were obtained from data collected as part of the February 2002 Buckeye State Poll. As noted in the chapter, the Buckeye State Poll was a monthly survey of Ohio residents sponsored by the *Columbus Dispatch*, the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank, and Ohio State’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The February 2002 Buckeye State Poll was fielded from February 1, 2002 to February 28, 2002 by the Center for Survey Research at Ohio State University. The questionnaire contained a standard set of economic questions and an extensive set of demographic and background questions.

A random sample of computer-generated telephone numbers was used to reach households throughout the state regardless of whether their number was listed or unlisted. Within each household, the English-speaking adult who had the most recent birthday was selected to be the respondent for the interview. A total of 2,250 randomly-generated telephone numbers was used for this survey, with many being called as many as 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for him or her to be interviewed. Of these numbers, 1,170 were presumed to reach a household with an eligible respondent. From these households, interviews were completed in 44 percent of the cases. Among those households where it was known that interviewers actually spoke with the eligible adult respondent, interviews were completed in 83 percent of the cases. Additionally, the data were weighted to take into account the number of telephone lines in each household and to adjust for variations in the sample relating to respondents’ county of residence, gender, age, race, education, and whether or not any non-adult children lived in the household.
APPENDIX B

INFORMATION ABOUT THE JULY 2001 BUCKEYE STATE POLL SPECIAL TOPIC SURVEY
The results reported in chapter 5 were obtained from data collected as part of the July 2001 Buckeye State Poll Special Topic Survey. As noted in the chapter, the Buckeye State Poll is a monthly survey of Ohio residents. The survey, which was sponsored by the *Columbus Dispatch*, the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank, and Ohio State’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, is based on telephone interviews conducted July 5, 2001 through August 12, 2001, with 793 randomly selected adult residents of the state.

For this survey, a random sample of computer-generated telephone numbers was used to reach households throughout the state regardless of whether their number was listed or unlisted. Within each household, the English-speaking adult who had the most recent birthday was selected to be the respondent for the interview. A total of 3,994 randomly-generated telephone numbers was used for this survey, with many being called as many as 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for him or her to be interviewed. Of these numbers, 2,095 were presumed to reach a household with an eligible respondent. From these households, interviews were completed in 38 percent of the cases. However, among those households where it was known that interviewers actually spoke with the eligible adult respondent, interviews were completed in 74 percent of the cases. Additionally, the data were weighted to take into account the number of telephone lines in each household and to adjust for variations in the sample relating to respondents’ county of residence, gender, age, race, education, and whether or not any non-adult children lived in the household. The analyses reported in the chapter were done with weighted data; however, the analyses also were run with unweighted data with virtually identical results.
APPENDIX C:

WORDING OF FRAMING STATEMENTS
USED IN JULY 2001 BUCKEYE STATE POLL
1) Elites unified in non-ideological manner, with positive frame of plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Some in Ohio argue that the legislature's new funding plan is good because it will provide more money for public schools without raising taxes.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

2) Elites unified in non-ideological manner, with negative frame of plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Some have argued that the legislature's new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

3) Elites unified in ideological manner, with positive (Republican) frame of plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Republicans argue that the legislature's funding plan is good because it will provide more money for public schools without raising taxes.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

4) Elites unified in ideological manner, with negative (Democratic) frame of plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Democrats argue that the legislature's new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.
5) Elites divided—frame providing both good and bad information about plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Some argue that the legislature's new funding plan is good because it will provide more money for public schools without raising taxes, while others argue that the new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

6) Elites divided—frame providing both good (Republican) and bad (Democratic) information about plan

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan. Republicans argue that the legislature's new funding plan is good because it will provide more money for public schools without raising taxes, while Democrats argue that the new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.

7) Control condition with no manipulation

You may be aware that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the current system for funding public schools and ordered the state legislature to create a new funding plan.

I am now going to read some statements about the Ohio Supreme Court. Keeping what I've just read in mind, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement I read.
APPENDIX D

MULTIPLE IMPUTATION USING AMELIA
Multiple imputation with the Amelia program provides the researcher with three primary advantages as compared to other methods of imputation: first, multiple imputation maintains the efficiency of analyses, as cases are not lost as they would be if listwise deletion was used; second, research by the authors demonstrates that the imputed values developed by the program closely approximate what the distribution would have been had cases not been missing, and Amelia ensures that the standard errors of point estimates are not artificially low—as often happens when listwise deletion of missing data is used (King et al. 49, 52, 60). The Amelia program uses an Expectation Maximization algorithm with importance re-sampling to impute $m$ values for each missing data point for a variable, creates $m$ datasets, and then combines the all $m$ imputed results into a final imputed result that is the average of the $m$ imputations (King, et al. 53, 54). Missing values are filled in with $m$ imputations to reflect uncertainty about what the actual data would have been, with the theory behind the program arguing that although any specific imputation might be incorrect, the average imputation for a data point across $m$ imputations will approximate what the actual data would have reflected had the data point in question not been missing (King, et al. 53). Users of the program only have to specify a substantive model that will provide Amelia with whatever knowledge is available about the missing data. I created a substantive model based in part on the model used in chapter 4 and thus allowed Amelia to impute missing values for my two missing measures of specific support using the following predictor variables:
• respondents’ gender
• age in years
• race
• education
• income
• ideology
• presence or absence of kids in the household
• whether or not kids in the household attended public schools
• approval of Governor Bob Taft
• approval of the state legislature
• evaluation of the direction Ohio is going in
• trust in state government
• view of waste in state government.

These variables were included in the substantive model because the instructions for the program advised creating a broad model that included any variables that the researcher hypothesized would have a substantive relationship to the variables to be imputed (Honaker, et al. 23). Additionally, all of the variables above have theoretical importance or are surrogates for other variables of significant theoretical importance.

Among the demographic variables included in the model, gender is theoretically important as a potential predictor of diffuse support because much research in political science has found that men and women approach political issues in very different ways. Additionally, given that the Ohio Supreme Court has struck down Ohio’s system of funding public schools three times (and in doing so, created significant uncertainty about how Ohio’s schools would be funded), I hypothesized that women with school age children in their households would be less likely to support the court than other respondents in my sample. Similarly, I included age and educational attainment as potential predictor variables because I hypothesized that older respondents and those with higher levels of education would think about support in different ways. Building from Zaller’s theory, I hypothesized that younger respondents (who are more likely to feel a
need for quality education) and respondents who are more highly educated would express support for the court. As with chapter 4, I included race in the model because previous research (including Caldeira and Gibson 1992) documented that blacks, in particular, have developed a deep distrust of courts and the criminal justice system, and thus, are less likely than respondents of other races to support courts. Additionally, I hypothesized that lower income groups (who presumably would have the most to gain from a revised funding system that was more equitable) would be more likely to view the Ohio Supreme Court’s actions favorably, and thus, to express diffuse support for the court. Given that the various funding systems struck down by the court were designed by conservative state legislatures, I hypothesized that liberal and conservative respondents would differ in their willingness to support the court and thus, that ideology would have a relationship to my support measures.

The attitudinal variables included in the model also have theoretical importance. Two variables in the model measured respondents’ approval of Ohio Governor Bob Taft and of the state legislature. Because the Governor and the state legislature worked together to craft the plans that the Ohio Supreme Court struck down, I hypothesized that respondents who approved of either the Governor or the state legislature (or both) would less likely than other respondents to support the court. I included the variable measuring whether the respondent felt that Ohio was going in the right or wrong direction for similar reasons and hypothesized that respondents who felt that Ohio was going in the wrong direction would include the Ohio Supreme Court in that evaluation and thus would be less likely to support the court. Moreover, I hypothesized that respondents who “trusted the state government to do what’s right,” either all of the time or most of the time
would be more likely than respondents who trusted the government some of the time or none of the time to express support for the Ohio Supreme Court. I hypothesized that respondents’ views of how the state government used its tax dollars also would be important, with less “cynical” respondents who felt that the state wasted few or no tax dollars being more supportive of the Ohio Supreme Court than those who felt that the state government wastes much of its tax revenue. I also measured respondents’ views of the goals of the state government and included that variable in the model as I hypothesized that respondents who felt that the state government was run to “benefit all people” would be more likely to support the court. I included a variable measuring the state government’s impact on the daily lives of respondents because I suspected that respondents who felt the government had a big impact on their daily lives would be more likely to have a strong opinion on the institutions of the state government. I did not, however, have strong a priori expectations about the direction of any relationship between this variable and diffuse support for the court.

Finally, I included a variable measuring respondents’ approval of the existing school funding system. I expected that this variable would emerge as a highly significant predictor of support for the Ohio Supreme Court and that it would be inversely related to support for the court. That is, respondents who most strongly approved of the existing funding arrangements would be least likely (because of the court’s decisions that required change to these arrangements) to express diffuse support for the court.
Because *Amelia* created *m* imputations for each of my variables of interest, I used the instructions that accompanied the program to combine the *m* imputations into a single new variable. Of note, *Amelia’s* imputation process did not change the data for non-missing cases in any way. Its algorithm simply eliminated missing data for my two measures of specific support.
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