THE EFFECT OF EDUCATION AND MEDIA COVERAGE ON PUBLIC
OPINION OF THE SUPREME COURT AND CONGRESS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Mary Elizabeth Outwater, M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
2004

Dissertation Committee:

Professor, Thomas E. Nelson, Adviser

Professor Herbert F. Weisberg

Professor Lawrence Baum

Approved by

Adviser

Department of Political Science
ABSTRACT

In survey after survey Americans have been found to approve of the United States Supreme Court more than they approve of the United States Congress. This trend persists despite the fact that Congress is an elected body, giving the people more control over it, and the Supreme Court consists of nine justices appointed to their positions for life terms.

In this study I examine two factors which explain part of the reason for this difference in public opinion—educational experiences and media coverage. Civics classes are an important source of political information for Americans and help form the basis of many political opinions. I hypothesize that differences in how Congress and the Supreme Court are typically portrayed in these classes contribute to the public opinion trend. Furthermore, I hypothesize that news media cover the Supreme Court and Congress in different ways which also contribute to how the public views the two political institutions.

The results from this research find that the media does indeed cover the two branches of government differently by being more negative toward the Congress than the Supreme Court. In an experiment that tested the ability of news stories to change public opinion toward the two institutions, however, results were mixed. Analysis of survey
data indicated that both the level and amount of civics education a person takes in their lifetime has an impact on approval levels.
Dedicated to the best father in the world.
I would like to thank the most wonderful husband that ever was, Andy Farrell, for the millions of things (far too many to list here) he did for me, and will continue to do for me. I can honestly say that I couldn’t have done it without him. I would also like to thank my Dad and Molly for their help and encouragement (especially for Molly’s help in editing) and my Mom for her support as well through this process.

I would also like to gives thanks to my committee members. First, to Tom Nelson who is so great at giving comments that it made revising so much easier. Next to Herb Weisberg for always being there to answer those questions that I needed to know right away and to both Herb and Judy Weisberg and the boys for letting me into their lives and their home. Last, but definitely not least, to Larry Baum for being there to listen to my sob stories and for being such a great teacher.
VITA

May 24, 1976…………………………………….Born – Bellflower, California

1998……………………………………………..B.A. Political Science,
California State University, Long Beach

2000-2002…………………………………….Graduate Research Associate
Center for Survey Research
The Ohio State University

2001……………………………………………..M.A. Political Science
The Ohio State University

2002-2003…………………………………….Graduate Teaching Associate
The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Political Science
Interdisciplinary Specialization: Survey Research
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract...........................................................................................................................................ii
Dedication........................................................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgments..........................................................................................................................v
Vita...................................................................................................................................................vi
List of Tables..................................................................................................................................ix
List of Figures...............................................................................................................................xii

Chapters:

1. Introduction.................................................................................................................................1

2. Theory and Hypotheses..............................................................................................................22
   2.1 Education...............................................................................................................................22
   2.2 Media..................................................................................................................................34

3. Data and Methods.....................................................................................................................39
   3.1 Content Analysis..................................................................................................................39
   3.2 Experiment............................................................................................................................46
   3.3 Survey.................................................................................................................................53

4. News Content and Experimental Analyses.............................................................................60
   4.1 Content Analysis..................................................................................................................60
   4.2 Experiment............................................................................................................................65
5. Survey Analysis

5.1 Description of Variables

5.2 Bivariate Analyses of Supreme Court Approval Levels

5.3 Bivariate Analyses of Congressional Approval Levels

5.4 Bivariate Analyses of Differences between Supreme Court and Congressional Approval Levels

5.5 Regression Analyses of Approval Levels

6. Conclusion

6.1 Media Coverage

6.2 Civics Classes

Appendices:

A. Survey Questions

B. Newspaper Articles

C. Experiment Questionnaire

List of References
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Differences between Experimental Groups on Approval</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>T-Test of Approval Differences of Ideology Condition and All Other Conditions</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>T-Test of Approval Differences of Scandal Condition and All Other Conditions</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Explaining Approval Differences in the Ideology Treatment Condition</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Explaining Approval Differences in the Scandal Treatment Condition</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Explaining Approval Differences in Participants who Read All Four Experimental Articles</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Ethics Differences for Supreme Court Justices and Elected Politicians</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Differences for How Much Ideology is Considered in Decisions</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Supreme Court Approval Rating Distribution</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Congress Approval Rating Distribution</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>T-Test of Supreme Court versus Congressional Approval Levels</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Approval Rating Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Mean Approval Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress by Political Party</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6 Mean Approval Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress by Gender
5.7 Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the Elementary and High School Levels
5.8 Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College and Graduate Levels
5.9 Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College” Experience
5.10 Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College Levels for Respondents with College Degree(s)
5.11 Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at High School or Above (0 vs. 1+)
5.12 Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at High School or Above (0-1 vs. 2+)
5.13 Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College”
5.14 Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with College Degrees
5.15 Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes Taken at the High School Level or Below
5.16 Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes Taken at the College Level or Above
5.17 Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes (0 or 1 vs. 2, 3, or 4)
5.18 Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes (2, 3, or 4 vs. 5 or more)
5.19 Approval Difference by Number of Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College”
5.20 Approval Difference by Civics Classes Taken at the College Levels for Respondents with College Degrees
5.21 Explaining Approval Levels of the Supreme Court…………………………….105
5.22 Explaining Approval Levels of Congress………………………………………109
5.23 Explaining Differences in Approval Levels between the Supreme Court and Congress………………………………………………..…………………110
5.24 Explaining Differences in Approval Levels for Respondents with High School Education and Below……………………………………………..113
5.25 Explaining Differences in Approval Levels for Respondents with Undergraduate Experience Only……………………………………………..113
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Differences in Newspaper Coverage</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE SUPREME COURT AND CONGRESS: WHY DON’T THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LOVE THEM EQUALLY?

The United States proclaims democracy to be one of its highest ideals and as a result public opinion carries a great deal of weight in shaping public policy. Surveys of public opinion are regularly administered by a wide array of governmental, academic, and other organizations in an attempt to understand what the public thinks and favors on every political issue imaginable. Public opinion affects virtually every aspect of this country’s government. Opinions, in the form of votes, directly determine the outcome of most elections for political office, as well as issues placed on various national, state, and local ballots. The force of public opinion also indirectly constrains public officials, both those who are elected and those who attain their position through a different route (such as justices on the Supreme Court who are appointed) by influencing policy positions or case decisions. Because of its widespread impact on our political system the study of public opinion is of extreme importance to the modern study of political science but, while a good deal of research has been done on this subject, there are many areas open to further study.
One of these areas is how the public’s opinions about different branches of
government are formed relative to each other. For example, there is ample evidence that
the public has a tendency to dislike government as a whole, but it is not clear why some
branches are held in higher esteem than others, such as in the case of the Congress and
the Supreme Court. Most research focuses on public opinion with regard to a specific
branch and does not look at variables that they both have in common. What about factors
that have the potential to affect public opinion for both institutions? Is it likely that
general, or diffuse\(^1\), opinions about Congress and about the Supreme Court are entirely
unrelated to one another? This seems doubtful considering that people get most of their
information about both institutions from the same sources, namely the mass media and
their own educational experiences. What then accounts for differing public opinions of
these two institutions? That is the concern of this study: to go beyond what the public
thinks about governmental institutions generally, or about one in particular, and to
explore possible connections between approval levels and explanatory variables that are
similar for the different political institutions. Specifically, I will investigate potential
explanatory variables for understanding relative levels of public opinion with regard to
the United States Congress and the United States Supreme Court. Instead of focusing on
separate variables to explain approval for each institution, the same variables will be
tested for both institutions.

As previously mentioned, past research has mainly focused on explaining public
approval of one branch or another but not both. In the literature pertaining to the

\(^1\) The most common definition of “diffuse support”, and the one used for this research, is “a reservoir of
favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed
or the effects to which they see as damaging to their wants” (Easton 1965).
Supreme Court, Dolbeare and Hammond (1968) focused on liberal-conservative attitudes of the small portion of the population that they considered to be knowledgeable about the Court’s activities and how these elites influenced general public attitudes toward the court system, but found more knowledge did not relate to greater or lesser amounts of approval. Others have been more successful in finding factors to explain approval levels by focusing on the actions of justices as a reason behind fluctuations in approval of the Court. Caldeira (1987), for example, found that the actions of Court justices had a larger impact on related public approval than did actions taken by the president during the time of FDR. Murphy and Tanenhaus (1968), in an earlier study, also found that public approval of the Court can be impacted by political events. Their data showed that the impact from public criticisms made against the Court by presidential candidate Barry Goldwater resulted in lower approval of the Court. In a similar vein, Durr, Martin, and Wolbrecht (2000) found the Court approval, while high, does tend to dip when the Court’s ideological position drifts away from the public mood. This pattern was found throughout the time-span of 1973-1993.

Supreme Court nominees is another area that has received the attention of scholars. Gimpel and Wolpert (1996), looking at four different nominees, found that there was a strong link between presidential evaluation and nominee’s evaluation. Additionally the impact of sociodemographic characteristics on those evaluations seemed to shift with each nominee. In a 1995 article, Gimpel and Ringel looked at the arguments given by people who either approved or disapproved of a Supreme Court nominee. Those who did not approve tended to justify their opinion using ideological arguments and specific issues. The ones who did approve tended to focus on the character and
abilities of the nominee, and felt that the nominee should be confirmed out of deference
to the president.

Another portion of the public opinion research has looked at how the impact of
decisions on approval levels can be selective. Hoekstra and Segal (1996) found that
public opinion can affect a small geographic area when the Supreme Court rules on a
case affecting that area whereas the rest of the population does not exhibit any change
from the decision. Public opinion can also be influenced when a highly salient issue is
first decided on, but not when subsequent, related, court decisions are issued according
to the work of Johnson and Martin (1998).

Factors that influence the public’s opinion of the Supreme Court are an important
part of this literature, but there is also significant attention devoted to how public opinion
affects the justices and their decisions. Flemming and Wood (1997) looked at individual
justices to see if they were directly influenced by public opinion. They found that across
issues and justices, this influence holds true whereas Link (1995) found that the
responsiveness of the Court to public opinion varied by the issue area (in this case the
Court was responsive to opinion about civil rights but not about criminal procedures).
Mishler and Sheehan (1993) found that the Supreme Court is very influenced by trends in
public opinion with a time lag of five years. Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995)
found similar trends but claim that the time lag is only one year. There are also many
scholars who do not believe that public opinion has a direct effect on justices’ decisions.
Segal and Spaeth (1993), for example, found no systematic evidence (at that time) that
led them to conclude that public opinion does have an impact on justices’ decisions.
Intuitively this makes sense considering that justices are appointed for life and can only
be removed in very specific circumstances, thereby making public opinion irrelevant to the future of their “political” careers. Many researchers still believe, and continue to find evidence for, a reciprocal relationship between changes in public opinion and decisions issued by the Court.

Turning to public approval and Congress, researchers have found many variables that help explain changes in the public’s opinion toward Congress. Patterson and Caldeira (1990) looked at approval of Congress in terms of both evaluations of job performance and confidence and found that current events have a strong impact on approval along with the popularity of the president, negative media coverage in general, and reporting of unethical behavior by members. They also discovered that sociodemographic variables, the strength of partisanship, and psychological characteristics all had only a slight impact on evaluations. Parker (1977), in an earlier work, demonstrated that there was a positive correlation between public opinion and economic conditions, the occurrence of critical international events\(^2\), and presidential popularity. In asking respondents if they thought Congress was doing a good job or a poor job, he found that presidential popularity, while significant, did not have an impact once other factors, such as the economy and whether or not a war was going on, were included in the model. He also found that the rally-around-the-flag effect does not influence congressional approval at the same level that it does for presidential approval. Parker raises the possibility that this occurs because people do not see congressional

\(^2\) These two variables have also been found to explain a great deal of presidential approval (Mueller 1973) which is why Parker chose those variables to investigate.
actions as salient in terms of their impact on wars, whereas it is for presidential popularity.

Borrelli and Simmons (1993) found a more tentative connection between national presidential approval and public opinion of legislators. More specifically, they found that the impact of presidential popularity on presidential support varies among groups of legislators and that the electoral context from which the legislator comes shapes responsiveness to presidential approval. Perhaps most importantly, they found that the impact of presidential popularity on presidential support by members of Congress is not uniform across all legislators. If legislators won their district by a wide margin in the last election, they behave as though presidential popularity is much less important in their legislative decisions. Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht (1997) focused on factors more within the control of Congress as also having an impact on approval levels. By using similar survey questions that all attempt to tap the same sentiment (general approval of Congress), they concluded that veto overrides, intra-Congress conflict, and the passage of major bills all had an impact on aggregate changes in approval in addition to economic conditions and media coverage. Even though all of these congressional actions are integral to the operation of the legislative branch, they all negatively impact public approval. They also found that when the president vetoed legislation that had been passed by Congress, approval for Congress ironically increased. The implication of this is that approval of one branch is often tied to the actions of the other(s).

Perhaps the most interesting relationship between public approval and Congress is that many studies have found that although people may indicate that they are displeased with Congress as a whole, they still support their own member of Congress (Fenno 1975,
Parker and Davidson 1979), which helps to explain why members of Congress have such a high re-election rate even while Congress generally has relatively low levels of public support. This trend has held up over a number of studies and over the course of time. Born (1990) found an exception to this trend during the 1978 to 1986 time period. He found that some people did link together their evaluations of Congress as a whole with their evaluations of their own legislator. The people who did this tended to be those with lower levels of cognitive sophistication which he considered ironic because sophisticated constituents should, theoretically, not allow their own legislator escape the responsibility of owning up to the faults of the entire body. Kimball and Patterson (1997) found that congressional approval is heavily dependent on expectations. When constituents have expectations of what their legislator should be like and that is different from how the legislator is perceived to be, then approval levels are low. Specifically, people are not pleased when they perceive Congress to be made up of ideological, career-oriented, lawyers.

Another segment of the literature focuses on the impact that public opinion has on the actions of members of Congress. Because Congress is an elected branch, the notion that what the public thinks has an impact on its actions is not a surprising one, but the specific area most of this work focuses on is what the degree of impact is. In the case of civil rights legislation Burstein (1979) found that strong changes in public opinion provoked legislative action, thereby demonstrating a direct link between the desires of the public and action taken by the legislature. Green and Guth (1989) investigated the difference in influence of the general public compared to political activists. They found that general public opinion was not as powerful as the opinions of activists in influencing
congressional action, using the issue of prayer in school as an example. Elifson and Hadaway (1985) also looked at why the public’s predominant position on an issue may not necessarily sway legislators to take action in response. Also using the school prayer issue as an example, the authors found that even though popular opinion was in favor of it, this was virtually ignored by Congress. Instead other factors, such as the demographic characteristics of school prayer advocates and issue salience, proved to be more powerful in predicting the actions of Congress. Finally, in trying to understand what motivates Congress to attempt to counteract decisions made by the Supreme Court, Clark and McGuire (1996) found that public opinion within a member’s constituency was one of the primary forces in influencing this decision.

The literature on the Supreme Court and public opinion has had a large focus in determining if public opinion has an impact on justices’ decisions, and how extensive that impact is. Another, smaller, part of the literature has tried to explain approval levels of the Court. Factors such as political events and saliency of Supreme Court decisions can have an impact on overall levels of support. Most of the emphasis in this literature is the impact decisions can have on the Court but there has been relatively little research that focuses on factors outside of the Court’s control.

The literature on congressional approval has focused primarily on the conditions of the nation (such as the economy and world affairs) and factors intrinsic to the operation of the legislature (such as conflict within Congress and the passage of bills) in addition to the popularity of the president as explanatory factors. There has also been a focus on why people seem to dislike Congress so much while still supporting their own local congressperson and when members of Congress listen to the majority of voters and
when they only try to appease a minority. What is missing from this literature is a concentrated effort on understanding the factors that tie Supreme Court approval with congressional approval, which is a gap that this research will help fill.

In comparing public opinion of the two branches, previous research (Marshall 1989; Handberg 1984; Mondak and Smithey 1997; Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981) has found time and again that the Supreme Court is held in higher esteem than is Congress. Without regard to specific individuals who hold positions in one body or the other or specific actions taken by the institutions (also known as diffuse support), public approval ratings consistently show that the American population supports the Supreme Court at a significantly higher level than it does Congress. Even when considering current events that could conceivably alter the pattern (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), this trend is always evident. The question that I raise here is why does this occur. Logically, it would seem that Congress would rate more favorably since it is a body elected to office whereas members of the Supreme Court are appointed and do not have any direct accountability to the public. Members of Congress have a strong incentive to be receptive to public opinion and to act in ways that pacify their American audience in general and their constituency specifically. On the other hand, the Supreme Court has no such built-in accountability. Evidence does suggest that the Court is concerned with public opinion for

3 Numerous polls conducted early in 2001 found that there were no lower levels of public support for the Supreme Court directly after the Court heard the Bush v. Gore case. This case was seen as a highly ideological one that decided the outcome of the 2000 presidential election. Supreme Court justices were widely criticized as voting strictly along ideological lines, a phenomenon that the public is not aware of very often in the Court compared to Congress. Because the Court justices were now being seen as political entities, many believed their approval ratings would more closely mirror those of Congress, and their legitimacy would suffer but neither of these phenomena actually occurred.

4 Many researchers (such as Fenno 1978 and Mayhew 1974) have found that re-election is a primary, if not the only, goal for members of Congress, thereby suggesting that public opinion matters an enormous amount.
many reasons (such as a personal desire for popularity and a concern for the Court’s legitimacy [Baum 1998]) but these concerns are generally not as pressing as those faced by members of Congress. Additionally the Court has the power to use judicial review to essentially overturned laws passed by a popularly elected political body (Congress) thereby circumventing the will of the people. Without any democratic outlet for citizen frustration it seems logical that the public would, if not resent the Court, at least consistently view it less positively than Congress. Despite these theoretical reasons, the evidence clearly shows that the Court enjoys a much higher level of success in the court of public opinion than Congress does. In a country that claims to value democracy so highly, such as the United States, how can such an inconsistency exist? How can the public favor an institution that goes against the basic idea of democracy over another institution that is organized and operated by the will of the citizens?

Past research has offered a variety of explanations to help illustrate why Congress generally receives the lowest confidence ratings of the three branches of government. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse in their 1995 book conducted a survey that showed most people believed that Congress was the most powerful of the three major political institutions. The authors suggest that people place the blame for the nation’s biggest problems on the institution that is seen to have the greatest ability to find solutions for them and that institution is Congress. In this same survey the Supreme Court was seen as irrelevant because it was perceived as the branch with the least ability to offer solutions to these problems. This suggests that one reason for the relatively high approval ratings for the Court stems not from genuine approval but from the public not seeing the institution as an important factor with regard to the nation’s current problems. In other
words, there is no reason to blame the country’s problems on an institution that does not have any power to rectify them. As a result, the Supreme Court enjoys the unique position of being able to receive accolades for creating policy relatively swiftly through its decisions but does not have to face the condemnation that can occur in the elected branches when the nation is having difficulties.

Another explanation for Congress’s low approval ratings offered by the literature is that Americans view debate negatively, for it is seen as the absence of productivity (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). The Democratic Processes Survey, conducted by the Gallup Organization in 1998, showed that most people believe that their views are a part of the majority, and that only a small minority of people thinks differently on most issues. According to this logic, if almost everyone has the same viewpoint on issues, why is it necessary for members of Congress to engage in so much debate over them? One answer is that they must have some ulterior motive for arguing, such as members of Congress considering the goals of interest groups, which are often viewed as being in opposition to the good of the constituency. As a result, because Congress’s debates are so common in the media and because these debates are viewed with suspicion by many, its approval ratings tend to remain low.5

Numerous other arguments as to why Congress is thought of so poorly by Americans can be found in the literature. A common idea (Fenno 1978, Cooper 1999) is that congressional candidates often seek election by running against the institution,

---
5 Television news networks now give coverage of debates and speeches made by Congress so that the only criterion for access is cable television. The Supreme Court on the other hand, is considerably more restrictive in its allowing the public to view any part of proceedings and their own deliberations are not made public at all.
particularly now that candidate-centered campaigning has become the norm over party-centered campaigning. Both in the short and long-term it is easy to see how this creates a poor image of Congress. If a congressional hopeful has as his message that he should be elected because he is different from the other members of Congress this implies that he is not corrupt and that he will listen to his constituents and not respond to interest groups or his own personal interests (assuming that, in some cases, these personal interests are not the same as the constituency’s interests). The image projected is that Congress is full of people who do not have, as their primary concern, their own constituency. Multiply this effect by 535 and Congress’s low approval ratings are easy to understand.

An additional explanation, proposed by Cooper (1999), suggests that many of the issues that Congress tackles are not easily understood and its business is not compelling to average citizens. As a result people pay little attention most of the time to what is going on in the legislative branch and they do not and/or can not understand the issues that Congress must deal with. But why does this mean that people support the branch less? As previously discussed, even when people have a basic understanding of the issue at hand they still do not like to see it debated and, as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse have suggested, when people hear or read about debates on issues they react negatively, which then creates low levels of public support for the institution. If people do not understand the central issue (due to its complexity or to its relative obscurity) it is a natural extension of this theory that people would be even less tolerant of debate, which is a central component of how Congress operates.

For the Supreme Court, there is limited research investigating why it continually enjoys such high levels of general public support. Some researchers (Perry 1999,
Slotnick and Segal 1998) have suggested that the general public does not know the basic procedures and traditions of the Court. To exacerbate this problem, justices severely limit their media appearances which thereby allows even less information to be readily available to the public. The implication is that less knowledge translates into greater support for the institution. Most of the literature that investigates the support for the Supreme Court centers on the theme that people have higher approval levels for it because they are ignorant of the Court’s processes, cases, the justices themselves, and everything else associated with the institution. Because they understand relatively little, it seems that people are, ironically, more acceptant of the institution.

All of these rationales for why the Court is regarded so highly and why Congress is thought of so poorly may be valid, but there has not been an effort made to combine the theories of Court and Congress into one investigation. Some of these explanations may hold true for one branch but not the other. Is there something that can tie the two together? One explanation is that people obtain their information and form their opinions based on what is presented in the news media. Because the media covers each branch differently, public opinion reflects this difference. The media, for their part, are restricted in what they can cover by the nature of the institutions and their reporting reflects those differences. For example, Congress is very open to having the public view many of its processes and many members of Congress seek out the media’s attention6. On the other hand, the way in which the Supreme Court operates behind closed doors keeps it away

---

6 Members of Congress seek out the media for many reasons but one of the most prevalent is to further their re-election goals. For example, they can use the media to draw attention to their accomplishments in Congress and they can maintain and increase their name recognition among the constituents.
from the prying eye of journalists\textsuperscript{7}. This is simply the way the institutions were designed and is not indicative of any attempt on the part of the media to manipulate information presented to the public. Congress, its offices created to be responsible to the people in the districts, was planned around the idea of open debate; the Supreme Court was not. Consequently the media mostly covers debates in Congress and only the decisions, not the deliberations, of the Court, and because people do not like to watch debate, this is one way in which the difference in approval comes about. This answer may provide a satisfactory explanation as to why there are differences in approval levels, but there is a great deal more to the story besides the different manner in which the institutions operate. It is not only the way the institutions are structured but the ways people learn about the institutions that contribute to this difference in public approval levels.

This research suggests that the answer is related to knowledge and the way information is obtained, but the reason is not simply that the media reflects the way the institutions are designed and that this alone creates the distinct levels of public support. Other practices of the media also contribute to the situation. One question to be addressed here is whether or not the media play any part in creating the types of stories that are put before the public for their consumption. For example, do certain types of events dominate the coverage of Congress and not of the Supreme Court even when they occur in both institutions? This question, along with others, will be empirically examined in this research.

\textsuperscript{7} Supreme Court justices do not have to run for re-election since they are appointed for life thereby eliminating one of the main reasons why public officials tend to seek out media attention.
Knowledge, or a lack of it, provides the foundation for most opinions and so it is a crucial variable to investigate in order to answer the question of why there is a consistent opinion gap between diffuse support for Congress and for the Supreme Court. With this in mind, I turn now to two specific ways that people accumulate knowledge about political institutions: the mass media and their personal educational experiences. The underlying theory of this research is that these two factors contribute significantly to the difference in approval levels of the two institutions because of the way in which each one is portrayed.

The mass media clearly is a major source of information for Americans with regard to the two institutions. Certainly it is the exclusive source for most people in terms of current events. If the focus here were on specific support for the branches, the story as to where and how people get their information would be a short one. Because a more general level of support is the central question, the answer is not as clear. Much of the media literature with regard to how government is covered implies that the media is compelled to report in an environment that constrains coverage to be a certain way. The one major exception to this is during the confirmation process of Court nominees, that occurs in the Senate, and which often involves a lot of media coverage (Graber 2002). Even though this situation brings a relatively great deal of attention to the Court, its members are still not seen engaging in active debate. The only person with ties to the Court in these situations is a person who has yet to be confirmed. On the other hand Congress is set up in such a way that opportunities for media exposure are almost

---

8 There will always be a percentage of people who will offer opinions on imaginary subjects or areas that they have never heard of.
endless. With public debates and members who seek out media attention, reporters have a great deal more flexibility. With these institutional differences in place it could be argued, as suggested above, that the media merely reflects this difference. Alternatively, some research has argued that the media misleads and neglects to inform the public in a reckless, if not purposive, way (Slotnick and Segal 1998, Graber 2002). For example, the mass media only report on a very small percentage of the Supreme Court’s total docket. While some of these cases are understandably not of interest to the majority of the population, others, ones considered to be major cases9, are also regularly ignored.

Two views of the media set up very different pictures of how the media influences the public and its opinions. In one version, the media are constrained by the institutions themselves and merely reflect their differences. In another, the mass media influence perceptions of the public, and in turn public opinion, above and beyond the actual differences that exist. For example, media coverage focuses on ideological conflict within Congress but virtually ignores it in the Supreme Court. Because the larger concern of this work is the role that information plays in the difference of approval levels between the Supreme Court and Congress, these views will be empirically investigated so that the role of mass media in shaping public opinion will be better understood.

Aside from the mass media, the other major source for political information is educational experience. Apart from possible family influence, the first exposure to politics and the governmental system that most Americans receive is through the formal educational system. This exposure increases as an individual advances through the levels

---

of education, particularly if a college experience is part of the process. Because of the structure of classes that deal with this subject matter, I contend that the United States Congress and Supreme Court are presented in such a way that ultimately contributes significantly to the difference in public opinion levels between these two branches of government.

In both my own experience and what Caliendo found in his 2000 book, in discussions of the Supreme Court a great deal of emphasis is placed on specific case decisions in the past that have made a large impact on government and society. Most of the relatively recent cases typically discussed are framed from the viewpoint that the Court stands up for minority rights when elected politicians are unwilling to do so (such as the famous case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas) and that this helps to strengthen the democracy. More specifically, Caliendo, in an in-depth analysis of the content from four high school government textbooks, collects findings concerning four elements of Court coverage in high school texts: function, process, judicial impact, and the justices themselves.

With regard to the function of the Court, Caliendo found that the texts surveyed described the Court as an institution that preserves democracy, at least partly because it is the final interpreter of the Constitution, and therefore fundamental to our concept of

---

10 Many states require college students to take a course that covers material about the American political system, therefore a large percentage of those with a four-year college degree will have taken at least one of this type of course. Additionally many who have had some college experience but have not earned a degree will have also had at least one such course.

11 The four textbooks were *American Government* by M. J. Turner, K. Switzer, and C. Redden, *United States Government* by R. Remy, *Government in America* by R. Hardy, and *Magruder’s American Government* by W. McClenagh. These texts accounted for 95% of the textbooks used within a single, unspecified, Midwestern state and thus are very likely to provide a representative assessment of high school texts nationwide.
Students are taught, rather overtly, to associate the Supreme Court with the basic principles of democracy such as freedom and equality.

The process that the Court must go through in reaching its decisions, as described in these books, is based on the idea that the justices make “rational” decisions, which are based on law, as opposed to “political” decisions (made by members of Congress for example) which are made based on outside influences (such as the influences of public opinion). This point of view appears to equate the Court with the concept of impartiality and logic which are terms not often associated with other political institutions.

Judicial impact discussions focus on the court cases regarding civil rights and liberties, with generally between 150 and 200 court cases mentioned in the course of these discussions (Caliendo 2000). This is one of the few areas in which the Supreme Court is implicitly tied to lawmaking. By discussing cases which changed either the law itself or the way in which the law was interpreted, the Court is being portrayed as a policy-making institution. However, these discussions are not grounded in the political nature of the decisions, but instead focus on the mere interpretation of the law.

The last substantive area Caliendo focused on in his analysis was how the justices themselves were treated in the text coverage. In this, justices were portrayed as striving to maintain their independence with examples given of justices recusing themselves from cases in which they had a personal interest. Again, the emphasis here is on the political independence of the judiciary in addition to the integrity of the justices themselves. While there was, of course, variation among each of the texts analyzed, the four core components, as described above, were all very similar.
Even though Caliendo does not undertake a systematic assessment of how Congress is depicted in these high school textbooks, the implicit suggestion is that coverage of Congress focuses on more overtly political topics, such as debate, compromise, and ideology. More of the discrepancy in textbook coverage of the two institutions will be discussed in the next chapter.

The literature has dealt only superficially with education and public opinion. For the most part, it has been relegated to act as a simple ordinal variable to be tested for significance (Caldeira and Gibson 1992). What this research has found time and again is that those with higher levels of education tend to be more supportive of the Supreme Court. At the same time those with more education are less confident in congressional leaders (compared to confidence levels for the people running the other institutions) (Casey 1974). As discussed above, some effort has also been put into dissecting course and textbook content for high school civics classes (Caliendo 2000), but it does not address the question of how these experiences affect people’s relative political opinions between the institutions. Is there something about people’s educational experiences that helps to create this gap between approval of Congress and approval of the Supreme Court? Do differences in these experiences in turn create differences in levels of public approval? Are citizens being educated to dislike Congress while at the same time hold American democratic ideals and the Supreme Court to a higher level of confidence?

---

12 Generally the treatment of education as an simple ordinal level variable consists of placing people’s education into one of a few broad categories, such as less than high school, high school, and college.

13 Civics classes, discussed in more detail in chapter two, were defined in this research as those courses that are intended to formally cover material and present information to students regarding the structure of the United States federal government and/or that discusses the rights and duties of United States citizens.
What type of relationship exists between public opinion and civics courses? These are the questions that will be addressed in this research.

The second chapter of this dissertation will lay out the specific hypotheses that are to be empirically tested. These hypotheses will be organized into two categories: those regarding the effects of media coverage and those regarding the effects of education on people’s approval levels of Congress and the Supreme Court. It is the intent of this research to keep these two lines of questioning separate in order to more accurately judge the effect of each, even though I theorize that they both have an influence on levels of approval.

In the third chapter the specific methods used to test each of the variables will be discussed. This research can be broken down into three distinct methodologies. The first is a content analysis that is used to measure the differences in coverage between Congress and the Supreme Court with regard to type and amount of coverage present in newspaper articles. The second, a survey of Ohioans, attempts to measure educational experiences and levels of media exposure in order to calculate the effect that these two variables have on approval levels for the two government institutions. The last method is an experiment that manipulated media coverage in order to investigate how different types of news stories can affect approval levels in an attempt to gauge the impact that media coverage has on public opinion.

The fourth and fifth chapters will examine the results of each phase of the data collection and relate those results to the previously stated hypotheses. In a general way, it is expected that the results will show that both a person’s educational experiences and
their exposure to mass media sources will affect their relative levels of approval of Congress and the Supreme Court.

Finally, the sixth and last chapter will discuss the implications of the results and their caveats, and draw conclusions from the data. It is not only the intention of this chapter to link the data to the specific hypotheses of this work but also to illustrate its connection to the study of public opinion generally and how various factors can influence it. The chapter will also discuss possibilities for future research and how this work has contributed to the greater understanding of political public opinion.
CHAPTER 2
THEORY AND HYPOTHESES
HOW CAN EDUCATION AND MEDIA COVERAGE EXPLAIN APPROVAL DIFFERENCES

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the specific hypotheses that are intended to at least partially answer the question of why there is a persistent difference in levels of public approval between the United States Congress and the Supreme Court. This research is focused on two key variables to explain this difference: people’s educational experiences and the mass media’s coverage of the two branches. Because these two variables represent two separate sources from which people get their information and therefore have different hypothesized affects on approval levels, they will be discussed separately here.

Education

The question of education as a component of support is an interesting one in and of itself, but it has already been studied on a broad level. Most of the work consists of analyzing only general categories of education (such as below high school, high school, some college, etc.) in terms of how they influence levels of approval (Caldeira and Gibson 1992), however the variations within the education variable remain mostly
unexplored. Everyone with a four-year college degree, for example, has not had exactly the same educational experience. Some people may have taken several civics courses, whereas others may not have taken any. The greatest potential for variation lies at the college level and beyond due to the variety of choices students have in selecting courses to take, but this variation also exists at lower levels of education as well. The purpose of this research is to add a new dimension to previous work by incorporating both the amount and the type of education into the analysis. To accomplish this, the number and level of civics classes (high school level, college level, etc.) will be measured and tested to see what effect they have on the level of support for the Court and Congress.

For the purposes of this research, civics classes will be generally defined as those courses that are intended to formally cover material and present information to students regarding the structure of the United States federal government and/or that discuss the rights and duties of United States citizens. More specifically, these are courses that discuss the roles and duties of the three branches of government and/or explain different ways in which citizens may participate in government. This definition is based on the Center for Civic Education’s statement (1994) that civics classes should “provide students with a basic understanding of civic, life, politics, and government’. These classes can include all levels of schooling, all the way from elementary through the college level.

More than half of the fifty states mandate that students take at least one civics course before they can graduate 12th grade (Tolo 1999) and at the college level, 20% of states require students to take a civics class (Kedrowski 2003). While these statistics certainly do not account for all students who take at least one civics course at either of
these educational levels, there is still a great number of students who are not required to take any civics course in order to obtain their degree. The students who have been exposed to the Supreme Court and Congress in a formal educational setting via civics classes will be compared to others who have not had this type of formal scholastic experience to see what differences emerge in their approval levels of the two institutions.

The amount of knowledge a person has, regardless of how it comes about, is a critical part of forming opinions about the government’s institutions. Particularly in the beginning stages of life, formal scholastic experiences represent the source from where a large majority of this knowledge comes from, second only to the family (Berman and Murphy 2003). These experiences therefore build a foundation of knowledge upon which many opinions are based. Because of this, for issues which people tend to know the least about (such as the Supreme Court), this variable has a strong potential for influencing opinions even after people finish their formal education. On issues that people have more knowledge it seems likely that a single source of information would have less of an impact on overall opinions if only because there are probably many more sources of information that contributed to those opinions in the first place.

The expected result from this research is that it will provide evidence that people with more formal knowledge about American government will have more approval for the Supreme Court relative to their approval for Congress. In other words, the difference in approval levels of the two institutions will be greater among people who have had more civics classes than those who have had fewer. This hypothesis is expected to hold true for the more basic levels of civic education (including elementary, high school, and possibly introductory college courses), however, at the advanced levels of education it is
expected that lower levels of support will be found for the Supreme Court. This will result in a curvilinear relationship. In other words, at the lowest levels of education in general and exposure to civics coursework specifically, approval of the Supreme Court will be higher than approval for Congress. This difference in approval levels will increase with more education and civics classes, but with advanced levels of civics education, however, the approval difference will begin to decline.

Civics classes are likely to have a polarizing effect on support for several reasons. First, classes tend to portray the Supreme Court as an institution that protects the rights of Americans, whereas Congress is typically presented in a way that focuses on debate and compromise (Caliendo 2000). At the high school level Caliendo compared the content of four civics textbooks (see discussion in chapter one) but not for the college level. I therefore performed a qualitative comparison of five introductory college-level textbooks of American government. The five books chosen were selected because each of them had been published for several editions suggesting that the original publications were successful enough, and used widely enough, to warrant additional publications. The five books are as follows: Essentials of American Politics (Spitzer et al. 2002), American Government, 8th edition (Wilson and Dirluio 2001), Approaching Democracy, 4th edition (Berman and Murphy 2003), Government by the People, brief 5th edition (Burns et al. 2004), and American Government: Continuity and Change, 2002 edition (O’Connor and Sabato 2002).

The discussion of Congress in each of the textbooks contained a section entitled “How a Bill Become a Law” or some other very similar wording. These sections talked about the institutions factors set in place that are part of the legislative process including
the committees, debates, and compromises that are necessary to pass any piece of legislation. Alternatively, there is no consistent section across textbooks that speak of discussions among justices. This by itself may encourage people to approve more of the Supreme Court than Congress because of the natural inclination to not like extensive, or even any, debate on political matters (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

Other section titles also support this disparity in the treatment of the two political institutions. For the Congress, titles, as well as content, often convey the idea that members of Congress must take into account many outside factors, in addition to the politics internal to Congress. Some example are ‘There are several influences on how Congress decides’, ‘Getting elected to Congress’, ‘How members make decisions’, and ‘The legislative obstacle course’. On the other hand, this message is generally absent from the judiciary coverage with section titles such as ‘The legal system settles disputes’, ‘The power of the federal courts’, ‘The Court’s independence in approaching democracy’, and ‘How federal court judges are selected’. The implication of this is that members of Congress have special interests trying to influence them, and to some extent succeeding, whereas the same cannot be said for Supreme Court justices.

The most obvious difference in the treatment of these two branches is that the courts are painted as the defenders of democracy and freedom much more than Congress is. Four of the textbooks looked at here devote two chapters to discussing civil rights and civil liberties (the fifth book only devoted one chapter to both topics) and detail many specific Court decisions (such as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas 1954) in which the rights of the individual were upheld against the attempt of the government to remove them. Some of the section titles in these chapters include ‘Free speech and free
people’, ‘First amendment guarantees’, and ‘The rights of defendants’. This close association of the courts, specifically the Supreme Court with the preservation of freedoms is likely to create an imbalance in levels of support.

There is also a strong difference in the amount of discussion of ideology or related factors in each of the texts. Direct references to ideology and partisanship are interspersed throughout the chapters devoted to Congress in addition to the chapters focusing strictly on political parties in America. However, the most direct discussion any of the texts analyzed here had on ideology in the Court amounted to only one-half of one page. With all of these factors in mind, it seems likely that people who take these civics classes and are exposed to these textbooks are likely to think more positively of the Court and less so of Congress.

The second reason why civics classes are likely to have a polarizing effect on support for the two branches is that the Supreme Court is usually given considerably less class time than either of the other two branches of government (Caliendo 2000). What generally happens in civics courses is that the federal court system is left until the end of the class. Usually by this time the instructor is running behind schedule and therefore is forced to devote a very limited amount of time on the judiciary generally and the Supreme Court specifically (Caliendo 2000). This prevents the discussion of less evident concepts such as whether justices are influenced by public opinion or how their ideological leanings affect their judgments. This then affects current and subsequent approval levels because the materials that are typically covered are the basic institutional aspects (such as the term length of justices, how they are appointed, etc.) and the
landmark decisions at the expense of material that would portray the Court in a dimmer light.

At the highest levels of education (advanced undergraduate and graduate courses) people are more likely to have a better understanding of the realities associated with the Supreme Court and realize the high level of discretion that justices have when deciding cases. For example, most lower level students do not understand that a single piece of legislation can be interpreted in many different ways, thereby allowing Supreme Court justices a great deal of latitude in their decisions yet still having their decision appear to be based in law and not ideology. As a result ideological policy preferences are very much a part of Court decisions. Those with the highest levels of civic experience will be more likely to see the partisan differences between justices and then relate the Supreme Court to Congress in terms of support. In other words, they have enough knowledge about how the Court operates that they can see the similarities between the two branches of government and consider members of either institution to be politicians, so it is expected that their levels of support will reflect this.

These imperfections inherent in the judicial system are not typically taught in the most basic civics classes and so may only be clear to those who have taken the more advanced courses, such as those offered at the college and graduate levels. In sum, having a greater understanding of how the Court operates in reality, not in the idealistic manner often depicted in basic civics courses, may create a higher level of cynicism, which would most likely lead to lower levels of approval. On the other hand, having a low to moderate amount of formal exposure to the workings of the Supreme Court is
likely to increase people’s level of Court approval over those who have none, or virtually none.

It is expected that people will tend to have their first civics class prior to high school, which is when the basics of American government are discussed, and will continue to take at least one course throughout all their subsequent levels of education (high school, college, and graduate school where applicable). This is the general trend that is expected to emerge from the data. It does not specify the precise number of civics classes that a person will have taken before they experience some type of change in their approval level for the Supreme Court however. Therefore the next few hypotheses will elaborate on the specific trends that are predicted to become apparent from the data.

People who have had a background in civics are likely to have higher levels of support for the Supreme Court than are those who have not had this type of education, for the reasons discussed above. This lack of civics may be the result of less education overall or merely because the person did not take a civics course out of choice, or some other factor. In terms of a specific number of civics classes, it is expected that only a few are needed in order for people to exhibit higher levels of approval for the Supreme Court. Because most states require students to take civics classes at least by high school, the data are likely to show that the vast majority of people will have taken at least one civics course sometime throughout their formal years of schooling, however it is unlikely that a single course taken fairly early in a person’s life will be able to increase their approval level of the Supreme Court. One course at the beginner level might not make a very lasting impression but two or more seems more likely to affect later opinions. Another reason why only one course would be unlikely to have a significant impact is because of
the nature of the material most often presented at this level. Most of the focus is on tolerance of competing political views, acceptance of democratic values, and political participation skills and not so much on the details of each branch of government (Erikson and Tedin 2001). Finally, basic classes taken at the lower educational levels, such as elementary or high school, are unlikely to produce the effect because courses taken at the college level are more likely, although not necessarily, to cover material in greater depth than those classes at lower levels.

At the other end of the scale, people who have taken several civics courses at this basic level are unlikely to be very different in their opinions than those who have only taken two. Prior to the college level, it is very unlikely that any civics course will go into great depth on any civics topic. Therefore:

\[ H1: \quad \text{People who have taken two or more civics courses at the elementary or high school levels will have higher levels of approval for the Supreme Court than those who have either not taken these courses, or have taken only one at the elementary or high school level.} \]

For those people who have taken more advanced classes in this area it is expected that a different relationship will emerge. As people learn more about how the Supreme Court really functions and some of the factors that go into the decision-making for cases, the approval levels will decrease. At the high school and lower levels of education it is very unlikely that any course would discuss the Supreme Court in such depth. Therefore only people who have taken college and graduate level courses will have had exposure to these ideas. Furthermore, only college students who take more than simply the introductory courses would have had this high level of exposure. Introductory college courses and high school courses are very similar in the topics they cover. As discussed
above, this usually includes basics such as how a bill becomes a law, the procedures justices go through in hearing and deciding cases, and other related introductory topics. All of this indicates that only people with both high levels of education and who have taken multiple civics classes will exhibit lower approval levels of the Court than people without these characteristics. The second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: People who have taken two or more civics courses at the college or graduate level will have lower levels of approval for the Supreme Court than those who have taken fewer courses or only courses at lower educational levels.

Overall, the pattern of approval and educational experiences is predicted to show that, once a person has taken basic civics coursework, they will tend to approve of the Supreme Court at higher rates when compared to a person who has not taken such courses. The people who have had civics at the advanced levels of education will show a decline in their approval level when compared to the group with only basic or intermediate civics classes.

Regardless of educational experiences, people tend to view Congress negatively, relative to the Supreme Court, at least partly because they are more aware of the arguing and debating over policy that regularly occurs. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) find that people overestimate consensus on issues. In other words, they believe more people are in agreement on policy areas than actually are. Based on this premise, it is difficult for Americans to understand why it is necessary for members of Congress to debate policy matters since the majority of people agree on what the appropriate resolution should be. In an attempt to reconcile this discrepancy, one explanation often used by Americans for the perplexing pattern of debate in Congress is that members are being
swayed by special interests. These interest groups often want policy passed that is contrary to the desires and needs of the constituents. In order to accomplish this they appeal to members of Congress on a personal level by giving incentives (such as campaign contributions in order to help with the bid for re-election). It is because of these incentives that members of Congress debate policy so much; they are trying to appease the interest groups so they will continue to receive the incentives, or so the argument goes (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001). The result of this is that Americans tend to view debate, and Congress, negatively.

This distrust of the relationship between members of Congress and interest groups is a common one, which can explain why approval levels of Congress are generally low. However, due to the material commonly taught in civics classes, exposure to these classes is likely to result in even lower levels of approval, but the relationship between civics classes and approval for the U.S. Congress is expected to be much more linear than the one for approval of the Court. Approval levels are likely to decrease slightly for people who have taken basic classes at the high school or college level but this decrease will level off after these initial few classes. The reason for this is that these classes teach students more about the processes that are essential to the legislative branch, such as how a bill becomes a law. Even in introductory civics classes the material tends to focus on the committee system, filibusters, and other aspects of Congress that are often seen as reducing its effectiveness while highlighting ideological differences among the members. This, in addition to the common belief that there is too much debate in Congress, will likely yield even lower approval levels for Congress compared to those people without civics class experiences. It is likely that there are some people (how many is difficult to
guess but it seems likely, given state standards of required course content, that this number should be small) who have taken a civics class at the elementary level but none at any higher levels (such as high school). It is expected that these people will not show any different patterns in their approval levels than people who have not had any civics classes because the class would have been taken so early on in a person’s life that they most likely remember virtually nothing about the material. As a result:

H3: People who have had experience in one or more civics courses at the high school level or above will have lower levels of approval for the United States Congress than those who have not taken these courses.

Together, the above hypotheses suggest that the difference in approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress changes as the number of civics courses and the levels at which they were taken changes. An overall model of approval of the two institutions and experience in civic courses would suggest that at the lowest number of civics classes at the high school and elementary levels people will have a difference in their approval levels. As the number of civics classes increases, this difference will increase as approval for the Supreme Court increases and the approval for Congress decreases. At the college and graduate levels, people who have taken two or more classes will show a decrease in their gap as approval for the Court decreases from its highest levels. This leads to the final two hypotheses regarding education and public opinion:
H4: People who have taken two or more civics classes at the high school and/or elementary level will have a greater difference in their levels of approval of the Supreme Court and Congress than those who have taken none or only one course at those levels.

H5: People who have taken two or more classes at the college or graduate level will have a smaller difference in their levels of approval of the Supreme Court and Congress than those who have taken none or only one course at those levels.

Media

The second variable under investigation in this research is the influence that media coverage has on the difference in public opinion between the Supreme Court and Congress. Mass media sources constitute the major source of political information for most people, and what they cover and how they cover it can have a significant effect on public opinion (see priming and framing literature such as Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997 and Nelson and Oxley 1999). If the media are able to influence the way people think about issues, the logical extension of this is that media coverage has the potential to affect institutional approval levels. By affecting the way people perceive issues, when those issues are related to Congress and the Supreme Court, approval levels could be affected as well.

There have been numerous findings suggesting that the Supreme Court receives considerably less total coverage than the other branches (Slotnick and Segal 1998, Graber 1989, Haltom 1998). However, there has been a lack of empirical work assessing the degrees of positive and negative coverage for the Supreme Court relative to Congress. Smoller (1986) and Tidmarch and Pitney (1985) found that a great deal of negative
coverage has been given to the executive and legislative branches but these findings did not extend to a thorough comparison of coverage of the Supreme Court. Others have also found that the level of negative coverage for Congress has been growing (Kedrowski 1988, Robinson 1981, Robinson and Appel 1979). Davis (1994) also concluded that “news coverage of the Court is slight compared to that devoted to the Congress or presidency” but this conclusion still does not shed light on any differences in the type of coverage received by each branch. The research here is in part designed to fill this gap by quantitatively measuring the type of coverage that the Supreme Court typically receives relative to the coverage of Congress.

The data from the research is expected to show that media coverage of Congress is significantly more negative, in terms of the absolute number of negative stories, than that for the Supreme Court. As stated previously, it has been found that the Supreme Court receives much less overall coverage than Congress. It is therefore a logical assumption that the Supreme Court is likely to be receiving a smaller amount of negative coverage, even if the proportions of positive to negative coverage were to be the same for the two institutions. This leads to the next hypothesis:

H6: The mass media will tend to present a higher number of negative stories of Congress than of the Supreme Court.

Testing this hypothesis is an important step in judging the effect of media coverage on the difference in approval levels between the Supreme Court and Congress, but it does not directly address the question of how media affects public approval. However, assuming that H6 is supported by the data, it is likely that a greater amount of negative coverage of Congress will result in lower approval levels for that institution.
Because of the assumed focus on negative aspects of Congress by the media, any positive feelings that may have existed at one point are not allowed the opportunity to regenerate. In general, when people hear negative things about something, such as a government institution, they become more negative in their opinion regarding the topic. Over time, these negative feelings dissipate and are consumed by more positive feelings, thereby creating a regeneration effect of the positive feelings (Mondak and Smithey 1997). In other words, when an institution receives negative coverage, approval is likely to decrease. If no further coverage were then received, people would gradually let go of their negative feelings and slowly feel more positive toward the institution, which would result in higher approval levels.

For the Supreme Court, overall coverage is so minimal that this regeneration of positive feelings effect has time to wash out any temporary dips in approval levels caused by sporadic negative media coverage. On the other hand, there are so many negative stories about Congress that those negative feelings stay with people longer, because they are continually being reinforced so people approve less of the institution. Therefore:

H7: People with more exposure to news media will have lower approval levels of Congress relative to the Supreme Court.

The corollary of the sixth and seventh hypotheses is that it is the way that the mass media is covering the two institutions that is creating the difference in approval levels. Specifically, the media places focuses much more on Congress than on the Supreme Court and this causes congressional approval levels to drop relative to Court approval. This would also then imply that if people were exposed to similar types of media coverage (such as similar amounts of positive and negative news stories), then the
difference in approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress would lessen. Alternatively, if factors other than media coverage were able to explain differences in public opinion, then a change in media coverage would not be able to alter general public approval levels.

The basic premise of these hypotheses described above is that the mass media is covering the Supreme Court and Congress in different ways, not just in the amount of coverage devoted to each institution, but also the type of coverage. Part of the reason for this is that the institutions themselves naturally encourage this difference. Members of Congress, for example, debate issues very publicly and often criticize other politicians, particularly members of the opposing party. As already discussed, the American people tend to view debate negatively, and research has also shown that negative advertising specifically can decrease voter turnout at elections (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). The implication of this is that people do not like the negative messages members of Congress are sending through both their campaign advertisements and their public debates, and, as a result, people tend to think more negatively about the political process after being exposed to these messages. On the other hand, Supreme Court justices do not participate in public debate and only rarely blatantly criticize their colleagues in public (at least not by name). If the above hypotheses are supported by the data, it may only mean that the mass media is reflecting the differences in the institutions that are obvious at the surface level and not digging deeper in order to gain a better understanding of the reality. Beneath the surface, it is clearer that the Supreme Court justices also engage in fierce debate and often say harsh things when they disagree with others on cases (Epstein and Knight 1998).
The seven hypotheses outlined above form the basis of this research. The next chapter will discuss the three methodologies that were used to measure the hypotheses. The first is a content analysis of media coverage of the Supreme Court and Congress. The second is an experiment that manipulates media coverage of the two institutions, and the third is a survey of Ohio residents asking about their exposure to mass media sources and their educational experiences.
CHAPTER 3
DATA AND METHODS

HOW AND WHY DO WE DO THE THINGS WE DO?

Three methodologies were used to address all seven hypotheses discussed in chapter two and to collect the relevant data for the study: a content analysis intended to measure the difference in coverage of the Supreme Court and Congress, a survey of adults in Ohio to gauge the relationship between approval levels and media exposure and civics classes, and an experiment that altered news stories to see the effect it would have on approval levels. These three procedures will be discussed in this chapter in terms of which hypotheses they were intended to address, the rationale for selecting them as opposed to alternative data collection methods, as well as an elaboration of the procedures used in each case.

Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted in order to address the questions raised in the sixth hypothesis which states that media coverage for the Supreme Court will be less negative than the coverage for Congress. Previous research has found that the actions of the Supreme Court are not routinely covered and any coverage represents a temporary shift away from the usual stories. Flemming, Bohte, and Wood (1997) and Slotnick and
Segal (1998) find that both the amount and quality of Supreme Court coverage are declining. In both of these works the authors investigated patterns of media coverage of the Court. Based on their findings, it appears as though nearly all of the coverage focuses on actions (or non-actions) taken on a specific case. There was no discussion of scandal and very little mention of individual justices. For landmark cases there is sometimes an increase in coverage, depending on the issues the case addresses, but most of the time coverage is very sketchy.

On the other hand, studies such as the one presented by Lichter and Amundson (1994) have found in analyzing media coverage of Congress that there has been a proliferation of scandal coverage and an increase in the negatively conflictual tone of coverage in general. Comparing the two areas of research makes it clear that there is much more coverage of Congress than of the Supreme Court. This research is important in understanding how each branch is portrayed but no prior research has produced comparison data about the type of coverage each institution receives, making it essential to conduct one for hypothesis six. Therefore a quantitative content analysis of selected newspaper articles comparing Supreme Court and congressional coverage was undertaken.

Newspapers and television represent the two most predominant media sources that people use to get their political information (Berman and Murphy 2003). It would therefore be ideal to analyze the content from both of these sources. However, even though more Americans watch either network or cable television news programs than read newspapers, only newspaper sources were used here. The first reason for this decision was that it is a great deal easier and cheaper to obtain copies of newspapers than
it is to retrieve archived television news broadcasts because of the free availability of
several newspapers and their archives via the internet. This convenience factor was
increased by the availability of internet search engines that are capable of selecting out
newspaper articles on specific topics, as opposed to the cumbersome task of finding
select news stories embedded in television broadcasts. Secondly, newspaper articles are
more likely to provide richer coverage for analysis. Television news programs are
notoriously limited in their news coverage on any one topic, whereas newspapers have
much more leeway in the space that they can allot for a single story. Because the main
purpose of this content analysis is to assess the degree of positive and negative news
coverage of the Supreme Court and Congress, newspaper articles have the best chance of
providing richer coverage to assess due to their sheer volume relative to television. Even
newspapers that are relatively small in volume will have more content than television
news in addition to a higher number of stories. Television coverage is likely to be so
limited that it would be very difficult to evaluate any differences in news coverage. In
other words, a relatively small sample of newspaper articles would have the same amount
of content to analyze than a much larger sample of television broadcasts.

Many television news programs also follow the lead of major newspapers in
deciding which stories to cover (Erikson and Tedin 2001, Bingham 1948). By using the
stories from newspapers, the data yield a very representative sample of the stories being
covered in both mediums (Graber 2002). Journalists themselves, regardless of medium,
claim that they have little choice in the stories that they cover in terms of the major
stories. There is a great deal of discretion in local news coverage, but at the national
level when a story is considered “newsworthy” it is covered and that is the main criterion (Epstein 1974).

The newspaper *USA Today* was the source from which the individual newspaper articles were collected. This newspaper was selected for a variety of reasons. The vast majority of newspapers are centered in a specific city or region. Because of this, the coverage is often influenced by the political views of the surrounding area, particularly with smaller newspapers. For example, most people across the country would probably consider the tone of the *Daily Oklahoman*, the newspaper for Oklahoma City, to be very conservative. This is at least partly because the newspaper reflects the general ideology of the region which is also fairly conservative. Given this and the fact that areas of the country greatly vary in their degree of conservativism and liberalism, the best approach seemed to be to select a newspaper that was relatively free of this problem. *USA Today* is available in all parts of the country and is considered to be a “national” newspaper and does not cater to any local political views. *USA Today* also focuses on stories that affect the entire country, as opposed to local issues, and so coverage of the Supreme Court and Congress is not likely to focus on specific states or localities but on the entire country. Finally, *USA Today* has a wide circulation with 5.6 million readers\(^1\) each day and is available in all parts of the country. An extremely large number of people are exposed to this news source, more so than for any other newspaper in this country, which makes this newspaper the best source for stories that may impact public opinion. Not only are the

\(^1\) Comparatively speaking, the *Los Angeles Times*, considered to be a major newspaper with a large circulation, has only an average daily circulation of just over one million. The *New York Times*, also a very prominent newspaper with a wide circulation, has a circulation of 1.1 million on weekdays and 1.7 million on Sundays.
stories representative of what other media sources (both television news and other newspapers) are covering, but so many people have access to *USA Today* that it is the best proxy measure to use in studying the types of news stories to which Americans are exposed.

Most other research that makes use of content analysis of newspapers utilizes other sources such as *The Washington Post, The New York Times, or The Los Angeles Times* as opposed to *USA Today*. Sometimes a variety of newspapers are necessary when the focus is editorials or political endorsements, because these segments of newspapers vary dramatically from source to source. For other types of news however, news media are “rivals in conformity” (Bigman 1948), particularly with regard to politics, with an array of topics that is highly uniform (Graber 2002). With a very large percentage of stories being similar across media sources, it seems to make little difference, when the focus is national news, which one is selected for analysis.

The limitation of using *USA Today* as the only source for news stories in the content analysis is that it is not able to encompass the wide variety of news coverage to which Americans are exposed. Altogether, there are a large number of television news stations and area newspapers which also serve as media sources of political information, and no two of them are exactly the same. Even though many stories used by each of them may be from the same source (such as *Associated Press*), the overall coverage of the news will never be exactly the same. *USA Today* is the best indicator of the news most Americans are exposed to, but is still unable to account for the differences in news coverage across the country.
News stories from *USA Today* were selected from the entire calendar year of 2002. This year was selected because of its recency and because it is a midterm election year. Recency was an important factor because the way that media covers the two institutions may change over time. While these types of changes are only likely to be evident after several years or decades, the safest course was to use a very recent year to avoid the possibility of outdated data. In order to get the most accurate assessment of a year’s worth of coverage, a presidential election year was avoided because of the tremendously heightened amount of coverage expected and, on the opposite end, a non-election year was not chosen because of the drop-off, relative to presidential election years, in political coverage that would be likely. The ideal year would provide coverage that is somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, which is a fair description of a midterm election year.

To select stories from *USA Today*, Lexis/Nexis was used as the search engine. To locate articles pertaining to the Supreme Court, the phrase “Supreme Court” was searched for in all *USA Today* articles (including editorials) from 2002. This yielded a total of 34 articles that used the phrase “Supreme Court”. In searching for articles about Congress, the terms “Congressman”, “Senator”, and “Congress” were searched, which yielded a total of 99 articles that used at least one of those terms. These phrases were chosen because they were able to produce a large enough sample to analyze and because a relatively high percentage of the articles were related to the topic in question. Other search phrases often yielded a collection of articles about a variety of topics that had virtually nothing to do with government institutions (such as movies or sports-related topics). In this search, the ratio of Supreme Court-related articles to Congress-related
articles is similar to what is often found in previous research on media coverage (Graber 2002).

After the articles for analysis had been selected, they were each coded into one or more categories. Of the 99 articles selected by using Congress-related words, only 46 of them were directly related to the United States Congress. Most of the other articles mentioned Congress in passing, but the article itself focused on a different topic. Of the 46 articles that did discuss some aspect of Congress, 32 of them were coded based on their substance, whereas the others were placed in a “miscellaneous” category. The articles in this category were not evaluative to any degree; they simply delivered facts related to Congress and did not interpret these facts in any way. An example of this is a news story that reported that Senator Kerry was planning to run for president in the 2004 election. The remaining articles were put into one, sometimes two, categories, which were created based on the content of the articles themselves. For example, several articles focused on ideological conflicts and debates within Congress and so a category for ideological conflict was created. Each of the articles was evaluated for content by myself and coded accordingly.

The articles selected from USA Today using Lexis/Nexis resulted in 34 selections, of which 28 were directly related to the Supreme Court. Because most of these articles contained very little evaluation or discussion of events, all 28 of the articles were coded into one or two categories. Most of the articles simply conveyed basic facts, such as when the Court was expected to announce a decision or that it took a case or refused to take a case. When there was speculation as to why the Court took a certain action, the article was coded in terms of the issues raised during the discussion as well as in terms of
the main focus of the article. This same process was used for coding of the Congress articles.

In any undertaking of content analysis, there is always the possibility of coder bias affecting the results. For this research, coder bias is not expected to be a significant presence because there are a minimal number of categories into which each article was coded, which creates less room for error than there would be with numerous categories. Regardless, I employed the services of another graduate student to code the articles into categories as well. The inter-coder reliability for the articles on Congress was 85% and for the Supreme Court it was 86%. This number is generally interpreted as meaning that there is a high degree of inter-coder reliability (Manheim, Rich, and Willnat 2002).

The results of the analysis, including a detailed description of all the categories used for coding, and how well they support the hypothesis, will be presented in the next chapter. It is expected that they will confirm the findings of other researchers in that there is more overall coverage of Congress than the Supreme Court and that they will show that there is proportionately more negative coverage of Congress.

Experiment

The corollary of the sixth and seventh hypotheses is that if media coverage of the Supreme Court and Congress were similar (such as in terms of negative and positive coverage) then approval levels of the two institutions would become more similar. In other words, the difference in approval levels would be lessened if there was a change in the way the media covered both institutions. Since it is impossible to convince media organizations of the country to cover news stories in a different manner, the only way to
test this hypothesis is to conduct an experiment in which news stories are altered to be more similar in specific ways and then present them to subjects in order to see if these changes affect approval levels.

The experiment was conducted in May and June 2003\(^2\) and used undergraduate students as subjects who received extra credit in their respective political science courses in exchange for their participation. A total of 188 students participated in the experiment. Political science students were used primarily because they represented the most convenient and cheapest population from which a sample could be taken. To solicit outside participants would have required the use of monetary incentives, and they would have been much more difficult to recruit. The shortcoming to not using a wider variety of subjects is that college students are more similar in their backgrounds and opinions than would be a sample more representative of the general population. Additionally they are very similar in their age and educational level (only a handful of the participants had completed their bachelor’s degree at the time of the experiment), which are variables known for having a significant impact on opinions. The advantage of using students as participants included that they were very easy to bring into the experimental lab (they all had at least a passing familiarity with the location in which the experiment was being conducted) and the large majority of them had usable e-mail accounts which allowed for appointments to be scheduled with relative ease. They were also all relatively comfortable with using the computers (which was a part of the experiment to be described below) whereas many members of the general population would have to be

\(^2\) It should be noted that the experiment was conducted before the Supreme Court issued its opinion on the cases regarding affirmative action and Texas sodomy laws, both of which were likely to, at least temporarily, affect approval levels of the Supreme Court.
instructed on basic computer operations such as mouse usage. Most importantly, the student participants did not require monetary compensation.

The experiment was held in the political science experimental lab of Derby Hall. Upon arriving, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form in compliance with IRB regulations. They were then randomly assigned\(^3\) to one of eight stations in the lab that was equipped with a computer and writing space. Those participants who were not in the control group clicked on an icon labeled with their station number which accessed the newspaper articles that they were asked to read. After reading the articles (or not in the case of the control group) all participants filled out the same survey asking them a variety of questions about their political opinions and media viewing habits as well as a few demographic questions. For those participants in the treatment condition, upon completing both the experiment and the survey they were told the purpose of the study, were advised that they should not to take anything in the newspaper articles as being true, and were asked not to tell other potential participants. A few of the participants suggested that they had detected the deception present in the study. After further inquiries, it was clear that most of them did not actually guess the nature of the deception, and none of the ones who were correct expressed certainty in their suspicions.

Four separate newspaper articles were doctored for use in this experiment. Two of them were related to the U.S. Congress, and two of them were related to the Supreme Court. This was done so that participants were reading the same number of news stories about both of the branches. One of the Supreme Court articles and one of the Congress

\(^3\) Participants were randomly assigned based on order of appearance in the laboratory. They were required to sign up for one of several time slots but this had only a tenuous relation to when and in what order participants actually showed up, thereby providing a natural random ordering.
articles focused on ideological disagreement among the institution’s members whereas
the other two articles (again, one concerning the Court and one concerning Congress)
focused on a “scandal” that had occurred within the institution. These topics were
selected after completion of the content analysis, which suggested that coverage of
Congress showed more ideological debate and conflict than coverage of the Supreme
Court did and that there was more of an emphasis on scandal in Congress. The purpose
of these manipulations is to test whether a change in media coverage can create a change
in approval levels by bringing them closer together (either decreasing Court approval,
increasing approval of Congress or a combination of the two). Because coverage in the
“real world” is not similar for the two branches, manipulating it in an experimental
setting allows this hypothesis to be tested while at the same time controlling for other,
potentially confounding, factors. Both of these events (scandals and ideological debate)
occur in both institutions even though they are only widely publicized for Congress. This
is the main purpose of the experiment: to allow participants to read about things that
happen in both institutions to see if that knowledge will affect approval levels. It does
seem likely that there would be a higher number of scandals in Congress than in the
Supreme Court simply because the larger number of people involved (535 vs. 9) increase
the odds of this happening. Ideological conflict, however, occurs with regularity in both
institutions as can be seen in the public debates held in Congress and the written opinions
on cases given by the Court.

The news articles were reconstructed in such a way that the two articles for the
Court were approximately the same length as the two articles for Congress. This was
done in order to limit the possible confounding effect that different lengths could have on
participants’ views of the institutions. To further limit the possible impact of non-experimental variables, some of the identifying information was stripped from the articles, including the date and the name of the newspaper (*USA Today*). For some of the articles it was necessary to alter the title to reflect the changes made to the content. The content of the articles was also altered in order to equalize the language, so that the intensity of the scandals and the ideological debates appeared to be as similar as possible. Additionally, some of the articles contained material that was not directly relevant to the focus of the experiment, so these sections were deleted thereby limiting the amount of time it would take respondents to read the articles. Doing this allowed for more subjects to participate within a given time frame, and it also likely increased the data quality of the survey responses because participants were not trying to rush through their reading of the articles. Both the original and the altered format of the four newspaper articles used for this experiment can be found in Appendix B.

The study design described above was selected because it was able to provide the best comparison of approval levels of both institutions. Negative information in general was the focus because, based on the content analysis findings, that was the predominant form of coverage and keeping the articles as close to reality as possible limited the potential for confounding variables to affect the results. Participants could also have been given articles about either one branch or the other, but the limitations on resources (mainly participants) necessitated keeping the number of conditions to a minimum.

Turning now to the details of the experiment, participants were asked to read zero, two, or four newspaper articles, depending on the condition to which they were assigned, and then asked to complete a survey about their opinions on media and politics.
Participants were not given the survey until they had finished reading all the newspaper articles assigned to their condition. This was done to prevent them from inspecting the questionnaire before or during the reading of the articles, so that they were not able to anticipate the questions they would be asked to answer. It was implied that the newspaper articles were real, when in fact they had been doctored from the original version. It was also implied that all of the survey questions were of interest to the researcher, when in fact several of them were included only to prevent the participants from guessing the real purpose of the experiment. The word “experiment” was never used in communicating with the participants, and instead the term “study” was used in order to avoid the likelihood that participants would attempt to discern what the experimental manipulation was and modify their responses to the survey questions.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in equal proportions. The first condition was the control group who did not read any newspaper articles but instead only completed the questionnaire. These participants did sit at computer terminals just as the other participants did, even though they did not use the computers. The second condition presented participants with the two “ideology” articles to read. They were presented in random order, so half the time the Congress article came first whereas the other half of the time the Supreme Court article came first. The third condition used only the “scandal” articles, with the same randomization technique employed. The fourth condition used all four articles. For this condition a pseudo-randomization was used. Four randomizations of this condition were set up. Participants were assigned to read either 1) the two Court articles then the two Congress articles, 2) the two Congress articles followed by the Court articles, 3) the two “ideology” articles
and then the two “scandal” articles, or 4) the two “scandal” articles followed by the “ideology” articles.

The questionnaire portion of the experiment was intended to collect data on approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress and on various demographic variables. Others questions were included for the purpose of confusing the participants as to the true purpose of the study. It is possible that if the participants knew that the main goal of the study was to assess any effects of the newspaper articles on the approval level of government institutions, this knowledge may have altered their responses. The questions regarding approval levels were placed first in the survey as to avoid any potential question-order effects. They were also worded in the same manner as those used on the survey of Ohioans to ensure comparability between the two data sources. The complete survey instrument used for this experiment can be found in Appendix C. It was presented to participants using a paper and pencil format.

In addition to the opinion and demographic questions, respondents were asked to report the station number to which they were assigned for the experiment. Upon entering the experimental lab, they were each told the number of their station which corresponded to the icon they needed to click on in order to access the experimental newspaper articles. Finally, the station number was also taped onto the desk at each station. Between these three methods of communication, it seems unlikely that the respondents would have mislabeled their station number. Despite these efforts, two of the survey questionnaires did not have the station number written on them, either because the participants somehow

---

4 The wording of the questions was the same, but the survey which followed the experiment could not use the branching format used in the telephone survey because it was not read over the telephone to participants.
did not see the question (which seems unlikely given the rest of the questionnaire had been completely filled out in both cases) or because the participants were confused as to which station number they were sitting at. Because there was no other way to determine the condition to which they were assigned, these two survey questionnaires were discarded. Not including these two questionnaires, there were a total of 188 completed surveys.

The anticipated result from this experiment is that those participants in the treatment groups will express approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress that are more similar than those participants in the control group. There are no anticipated differences between the “scandal” condition and the “ideology” condition, but in separating these two effects the data may show that one is more able than the other to influence approval ratings. The same questions concerning media usages which were placed on the survey of Ohioans were also used in this experimental setting. It is expected that, as is true for the survey of Ohioans, greater exposure to news media will result in lower approval of Congress, making the difference of approval between the two institutions greater than for those with less exposure. These questions were primarily included as control variables, and not for analysis with regard to any hypotheses in this research, because of the limited variation that is expected to be found among college students.

**Survey**

In order to address many of the hypotheses of this research, it was necessary to conduct a survey that reached as representative a sample of the population as possible. A
survey of this type also needs a sample with a wide range of background characteristics and opinions, which may be more difficult to find in, for example, a student-based survey. To accomplish this, a small battery of survey questions was added to The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), a telephone survey conducted every four years in the state of Ohio which asks respondents about their voting behaviors and political opinions on a variety of issues, both foreign and domestic.

TOPS was conducted in November and December 2002, beginning just after the midterm elections, by the Center for Survey Research at The Ohio State University. A total of 550 respondents completed the survey, although not every person answered every question. The survey population of interest for the TOPS study was adults living in the state of Ohio. Even though the focus of this research concerns approval levels of ALL adults, there is no reason why Ohioans would be systematically different from the rest of the nation in this regard. Respondents for the survey were selected through a random-digit-dialing process whereby area codes and prefixes were supplied to a computer and the computer random generated the suffixes for each of the telephone numbers dialed. Area codes were supplied to ensure that all telephone numbers dialed would be in the state of Ohio. Prefixes were supplied in order to eliminate many of the business and other non-residential numbers from the sample (because only people reached through residential telephone numbers were eligible to complete the survey). The sample used for the survey was purchased by the Center for Survey Research from Genesys Sampling Systems, Inc., which also purged many of the additional business and other non-

---

5 TOPS was sponsored by the Department of Political Science and the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at The Ohio State University with Professors Dean Lacy and Gerry Kosicki as principal investigators.
residential telephone numbers from the list. Individual respondents were then selected from dialed households by using the most-recent birthday method. This requires the interviewer to ask the person answering the telephone which member of the household had the most recent birthday and then only completing the survey with that person\textsuperscript{6}. This ensures that the respondent will be selected in a random manner. The requirements for being eligible to participate in the survey were that the respondent must live in the state of Ohio, be at least 18 years of age, be able to speak English fluently, and be both mentally and physically capable of completing the interview.

Interviewers attempted to contact selected households at least 20 times (the maximum number of call attempts to a single telephone number was 40 times) on different days and at different times before no more call attempts were made. This was done in order to get the highest response rate possible, on the theory that by doing so the amount of bias is reduced\textsuperscript{7}. Reducing overall bias is important when the purpose of the research is to apply the results to a larger population, as is the case here. A total of 810 completed surveys were obtained using this method. It should be noted that a portion of the sample was part of a panel study. This survey was the second study in the panel, and the respondents from the first wave of the panel made up about one-third of the total number of completed interviews. Both parts of the sample were originally obtained through the randomization methods discussed above. Because both parts of the sample were contacted in the same manner, there is no reason that people making up the panel

---

\textsuperscript{6} In situations where the person with the most recent birthday is unavailable at that time, interviewers then call the household back at a later time.

\textsuperscript{7} There is always a certain amount of bias in any survey because there is always a percentage of the sample that will be impossible to contact and that will refuse to participate in the study, but it is ideal to keep this percentage down to the minimum.
study would be systematically different from those in the rest of the sample in any way.

The response rate obtained from the panel portion of the sample was 85%, and the response rate obtained for the rest of the sample was 43%. The overall length of the survey varied, but the average time was approximately 30 minutes.

The specific purpose of my survey questions was to collect data to analyze for the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and seventh hypotheses. The first five hypotheses focus on the relationship between civics courses and approval for the Supreme Court and Congress. To collect data for this, respondents were asked to relate the number of civics classes that they had taken and at what level of education they had taken them (such as elementary school, high school, etc.). A definition of the term “civics classes” was given to the respondents in order to avoid different interpretations a phrase like that might elicit from several hundred respondents. Respondents were told by the interviewer “by civics classes I mean any class you have ever taken that talked about American government or citizenship”. They were asked how many total civics classes they had taken at any point in their education, and then they were asked how many they had taken at each of four different levels of education. Respondents were asked how many civics classes they had taken prior to high school, at the high school level, during their undergraduate college education, and during any graduate school training. Before being given these questions, respondents had been asked about their overall level of education as part of the demographic battery of questions that is standard on any scientific survey. If a

---

8 The rate was calculated by using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR) response rate number 5. It is calculated by using the number of completions as the numerator and the number of ineligible households as the denominator. In this case the numerator was 260 and the denominator was 307.
respondent had answered that their highest level of education was high school, for example, they would not be asked how many civics classes they had taken at either of the college levels. This is done to keep the length of the survey down to the minimum\(^\text{10}\) and to prevent respondent frustration that could result if they were asked questions not relevant to themselves.

There is the possibility that respondents, who are first asked to provide an overall number of civics classes taken, would then answer the subsequent questions in such a manner to ensure that the numbers add up. In other words, without that first question, the respondent may have given different answers to the other questions. However, this danger is present whether the total number is asked first or last. As it turned out, it did not appear that respondents were concerned with whether or not the numbers “added up” or not, so it is unlikely that this possibility detracted significantly, or at all, from the overall data quality. In any survey there are problems with respondents misreporting their own personal information because of memory difficulties or some other reason\(^\text{11}\). For this survey in particular, many respondents would probably have a difficult time in accurately remembering the number of civics classes they took, particularly during the early years of their education. This problem is likely to worsen the older a respondent is. However, because these errors are very likely to be unintentional, they would be

---

9 This response rate was also calculated by using AAPOR response rate 5. The numerator in this case was 552 and the denominator was 1,282.

10 By keeping the survey length at a minimum, it increases the number of interviews that end in a completed survey as opposed to ones that end in only a partial completion.

11 One of the most common other reasons is “satisficing”, which is when the respondent gives the mentally easiest acceptable answer to the question. This could mean that instead of taking the time to think about the question in order to give the most accurate response, the respondent simply gives the first answer that comes to mind that has the possibility of being correct.
randomly occurring and would therefore cancel out in the full analysis. A full list of the
survey questions and the wording used by the interviewers can be found in Appendix A.

Respondents were also asked about their overall approval levels of the Supreme
Court and Congress, in order to compare differences in approval levels with experience in
civics courses. These questions came at the very beginning of the survey and so were not
influenced by the other questions in the study. Question-order effects have the potential
to alter respondents’ answers (Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen 1996), so the questions
were placed with great care in the overall survey. The questions regarding civics classes
were towards the end of the survey and, judging by the types of questions asked before
them, it seems doubtful that any of them affected the responses given.

Additional questions were asked of the respondents regarding their exposure to
mass media sources. These included the amount of time each day the respondent
watched television news programs and how much time per week they spent reading a
daily newspaper. The wording of these questions was used because of their widespread
use in surveys, and they are intended to measure the relationship between amount of
media exposure and approval levels. This survey included questions derived from many
different sources and, because of this they needed to be worded in such a way that would
be useful to the other researchers wherever possible. Because these questions are often
used as control variables in research, they needed to be worded in the standard way for
comparability purposes. These questions were included for the purpose of addressing the
seventh hypothesis, which theorizes that people who have had more exposure to news

---

12 The majority of these other questions focused on respondents’ opinions about foreign events and were
not related to education or media use.
media sources are more likely to have a bigger difference in their approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress.

The results from the survey are expected to show general evidence of the curvilinear pattern of approval for the Supreme Court; that support will increase when people have taken a moderate number of civics classes and then decrease if a person has had a high number of classes. It is also anticipated, assuming that the hypothesis addressed by the content analysis is supported by the data, that higher levels of exposure to news media will result in a widening of the differences in approval levels between the two institutions. As people are exposed to more news media, it is likely that they are exposed to more negative stories about Congress than about the Supreme Court. Therefore, at higher levels of media exposure, approval of Congress is expected to decrease while approval for the Supreme Court is likely to increase or at least remain at a constant level, as described in the last hypothesis.

The next two chapters will focus on the analysis of the data that was collected following the procedures described above and discuss whether or not the hypotheses are supported. The fourth chapter will cover the content analysis and the experiment while the fifth chapter will focus on the survey of Ohioans.
CHAPTER 4
NEWS CONTENT AND EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSES

NEWS MEDIA MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In this chapter the results of the content analysis and experiment will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the hypotheses. The data are expected to show, generally, that media cover the Supreme Court and Congress in different ways and this coverage can have an impact on approval levels of the institutions and on the difference between the two.

Content Analysis

In assessing the way that newspapers cover the two institutions and addressing hypothesis six, Congress-related and Supreme Court-related newspaper articles from USA Today were assigned to one (or in a few cases two) of five categories making a total of ten categories for both of the institutions together. These categories were selected based on the content of the articles. As mentioned in the last chapter, 46 of the articles analyzed directly related to Congress and 34 directly related to the Court. These articles represented all of those that were suitable for analysis for the year 2002. Each article was summarized and from these summaries a coding scheme was created to accurately describe the types of news stories most commonly found. The articles used here for
analysis represent all stories that were directly about one of the two institutions in questions. For example, an article simply mentioning the Supreme Court in a discussion of the president would not have been included in the analysis. The same method was used in creating categories for articles on both Congress and Supreme Court.

The five categorizations in which the Congress articles were placed were: corrupt politicians, overwhelmingly positive, ideological conflict, Democrats vs. President Bush, and a miscellaneous category that consisted of articles that contained no evaluative content and that did not belong in any of the above categories. “Corrupt politicians” focused on misdeeds of members of Congress (such as Jim Traficant’s conviction) and emphasized misuse of power. This type of article represented 26% of those analyzed for Congress. Articles in the “overwhelmingly positive” category were generally articles that discussed the achievements of a particular member of Congress and the overall tone of the article was very positive (in a few cases the term “gushing” might be a more accurate description) and accounted for 9% of the total. The two categories of “ideological conflict” and “Democrats vs. President Bush” were separated because the articles in the ideological conflict category only discussed conflict between members of Congress or groups within Congress whereas the Democrats vs. Bush category only talked about the tensions between the current president and Democratic members of Congress. Respectively, they comprised 24% and 13%1 of the articles. Finally, the miscellaneous

---

1 These numbers add up to more than 100% because a few articles were put into two categories based on content. When an article appeared to belong in multiple categories, such as an article discussing both scandal within Congress and ideological conflict among the members, it was placed into both categories. The same process was used for the Supreme Court articles as well.
category accounted for 30%. These five categories were able to describe all of the articles which were directly related to Congress.

Five categories were necessary to thoroughly describe the type of coverage the Supreme Court received from USA Today. They were: ideology, procedural, sitting justice, personnel change, and miscellaneous. The “ideology” category was reserved for those articles that discussed judges and/or their decisions in terms of ideology and this totaled 21% of the Supreme Court articles. “Procedural” meant that the article focused on some procedural aspect of the Court (such as that they refused to hear a case, or they heard arguments on a case) but it did not discuss the implications of the action or speculate on reasons for it. This category represented the majority of the articles at 64% and included four articles that indicated a decision had been made by a divided court, meaning that the decision was either 5-4 or 6-3. Because each of these articles mentioned the division of justices only briefly and did not speculate as to what such a division might mean (including that it shows the ideological leanings of the justices), these articles were placed in the “procedural” category. Judging from the results of this content analysis, it does not appear that divided opinions are given any more attention than are unanimous decisions unless the case is particularly noteworthy. Speaking from anecdotal evidence, when a very controversial or ground-breaking case is decided on and the justices do not agree, there seems to be heightened levels of media coverage but, as is evidenced by this analysis, this does not occur very often at least in 2002.

A few of the remaining articles were commentaries about a sitting justice but did not refer to ideology or related issues and so were placed in the “sitting justice” category and they accounted for 11%. A couple of the articles discussed the possibility of one
justice retiring from the bench and another being appointed to fill the position and they equaled 7% of the articles. Finally there were a few miscellaneous articles that did not fall under any of these categories and were all very different from each other and they accounted for 14% of the total number of articles.

The two categories of particular interest for this research are those of “ideology” and “scandal”. Both of these categories represent types of stories that could theoretically be covered in both institutions and the extent of their presence within any given year of newspaper coverage may represent a factor that causes difference in approval levels. It is the theory of this research that both subjects could be covered in equivalent proportions but they are not. As can be seen in Figure 4.1 below, there is a substantial difference in the proportion of scandal-based stories for the Supreme Court and for Congress. While 26% of all congressional articles covered a scandal, none of the Supreme Court articles did. In contrast, 21% of the Supreme Court articles were categorized as ideological versus 24% of the Congress articles making the difference in this category much more modest.
The data show that ideological conflict within the institution is covered at a higher rate for Congress than for the Supreme Court, but that rate is only marginally higher at a 3% difference. The data also reveal that there is significantly more negative coverage of Congress considering that there was not a single scandal article about the Supreme Court in the sample. For the purposes of this study, “negative” articles are those that focus on scandal, corruption, controversy, ideological conflict, and/or heated debate\(^2\). There were no articles for either branch that focused on ideology without referring to some type of conflict (therefore all ideology articles were conflictually based).

\(^2\) As discussed earlier, people tend to view debate negatively (Hibbing, Theiss-Morse 2002) so articles focusing on these topics were considered to be “negative”.
This supports H6 which states that coverage of Congress will be more negative than coverage of the Court. The number of the analyzed articles categorized this way for Congress constitutes 50% but articles that could be categorized this way for the Supreme Court come out to be no more than a quarter of the total. This figure comes from the percentage of articles that discussed ideology within the Court. These articles did not necessarily discuss ideological debate as they usually did in Congress-related articles, so this represents the most negative interpretation of Court coverage based on the sample. Many of the Court articles mentioned ideology in passing by referring to the ideological disposition of a justice. Articles about Congress, on the other hand, virtually always discussed the tension between people of differing ideologies. Even by using this most stringent comparison of the institution’s coverage, the Supreme Court still receives far less negative coverage than does Congress. The data also support the findings of previous research that there is much more total coverage of Congress than there is of the Court. The impact of this finding together with the higher proportion of negative stories for Congress suggests that people read far more negative articles about Congress.

Now that it has been established that media coverage from USA Today in 2002 is skewed, the next question is how that affects approval levels of the two institutions. Is there a causal relationship between media coverage and public opinion or is it just a correlational one? This question is one of the main foci of the next section.

Experiment

In looking at the effects media can have on approval levels, it was important to conduct an experiment that was able to control the content of news media stories in order
to gauge the type of impact a change in news coverage can have. As discussed in the previous chapter, experimental participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in which they read two “ideology” articles, two “scandal” articles, all four of the articles, or none of the articles (the control group)\(^3\). The articles read were evenly split between Congress and the Supreme Court as the article’s main focus. Participants were then asked in two separate questions about their approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress. These two scales were then combined to create a single variable (Supreme Court approval minus Congress approval) which served as the dependent variable. The results of a one-way ANOVA test\(^4\) comparing the means between each of the experimental conditions indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the means of the experimental conditions as shown in Table 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutiona(\text{l Approval})</th>
<th>Control Condition</th>
<th>Ideology Articles</th>
<th>Scandal Articles</th>
<th>All Articles</th>
<th>F-Statistic (Significance Level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court</td>
<td>2.174</td>
<td>2.447</td>
<td>2.396</td>
<td>2.426</td>
<td>F=.71 (p=.5478)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>2.565</td>
<td>3.106</td>
<td>2.542</td>
<td>2.915</td>
<td>F=2.57 (p=.0555)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Difference</td>
<td>-.391</td>
<td>-.659</td>
<td>-.146</td>
<td>-.491</td>
<td>F=2.30 (p=.0789)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1: One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Differences between Experimental Groups on Approval**

This result, instead of indicating that the difference in approval levels decreases with exposure to more similar types of news coverage for the two institutions, as

\(^3\) Both the original and experimental versions of the newspapers articles can be found in their entirety in Appendix B.
predicted by the seventh hypothesis, shows a fluctuation. With ANOVA testing significance between any two given means is not tested (all the means together are tested) and so from this analysis it is not possible to say whether all differences are significant or not. However, the fluctuations in the means were statistically significant at .0789. Each of the mean differences in approval levels is a negative number meaning that participants approved of the Supreme Court more than they approved of Congress, as was expected, but the differences in how much more they approved of the Court shifted throughout experimental conditions. Those reading the ideology articles and all four of the articles showed an increase in their approval difference, as opposed to a decrease which was the expected result, even though from the ANOVA test it is not possible to determine whether this difference was significant. The difference between the control group and the ideology condition is much greater than the difference between the control and “all four” condition. In contrast, the participants who read the scandal articles did exhibit a decrease in their approval differences. This was predicted by the hypotheses which suggested that when people read about scandal occurring in both institutions they will approve of those institutions at more similar rates.

At first glance, the data appear to indicate that participants who read the ideology articles became more negative in their impressions of Congress than for the Supreme Court. The statistical tests show that none of the differences between the means of Supreme Court approval are significant (p=.5478) but some of the differences for congressional approval were with p=.0555. The expected results were that the two

---

4 ANOVA (analysis of variance) is “a statistical test that makes a single overall decision as to whether a significant difference is present among three or more sample means” (Levin and Fox 2003).
institutions would be seen as more similar but it appears participants thought it was worse for members of Congress to be ideological than it was for justices, judging from the dips in mean approval levels.

The data from the scandal condition performed as anticipated. The difference between the control and scandal conditions was almost nonexistent for congressional approval but Supreme Court approval dropped. As predicted, the data indicate that people already identified members of Congress with scandal so reading the articles did not appear to change perceptions. The concepts of scandal and the Supreme Court tend to be not as clearly linked so by reading the articles participants were impacted to a greater extent than they were for Congress. The participants who read all four of the articles indicated approval levels in between the other two experimental groups and very similar to that of the control condition. It appears that, for this treatment, the effect of the scandal and ideology articles cancelled each other out in terms of the overall approval difference. This occurred because ratings of both branches were lower by approximately the same amount as in the control condition resulting in no change in overall difference.

Table 4.1 also shows evidence that the newspaper articles participants were asked to read had a negative impact on approval levels of both institutions. Approval levels for the Supreme Court decreased across all experimental conditions and levels for Congress decreased in two out of the three treatment groups, but it is not possible to know which shifts were significant from the ANOVA analysis. My explanation for why this occurred is that participants recognized flaws in both groups and expressed approval levels accordingly. They did not see the Supreme Court as being another political institution similar to Congress, but rather as a body influenced by ideology and the justices’ own
fallacies. Therefore instead of this manipulation of media coverage being able to change approval of the Supreme Court more so than that for Congress, it affected both branches to a similar degree.

In order to tease apart some of the significant effects from the ANOVA analysis, a few t-tests were conducted. The first one (shown below in Table 4.2) compares approval differences between participants in the ideology condition and those in all of the other conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control, scandal, and “all 4” conditions</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>-.340</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology condition only</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-.660</td>
<td>.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>188 (total)</td>
<td>.319</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.027 one-tailed, Ha: diff > 0

Table 4.2: T-Test of Approval Differences of Ideology Condition and All Other Conditions

The analysis reveals that after reading the ideology articles, participants had a significantly larger difference in their approval ratings of the two institutions than did other participants. This implies that even though participants were presented with similar articles pertaining to both institutions, they punished Congress more than the Court for acting ideologically by giving lower approval ratings. A similar analysis, Table 4.3, was conducted to test to ascertain if there was a difference between the scandal condition and all other conditions. These two groups were tested to see if the means indicated significant decreases in approval difference.
Once again the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with participants in the scandal condition exhibiting a smaller degree of variation in their approval levels. It appears that reading stories about scandal in both of the institutions resulted in participants viewing both groups as more similar to one another. Even though both scandal and ideology articles were predicted to have the same type of impact, a decrease in approval level differences, they had opposite effects.

To get a better understanding of the factors affecting approval differences in this experiment, three regression analyses were conducted in order to control for variables that may be affecting how people rate the institutions. The dependent variable in these analyses is the Supreme Court approval rating minus the rating for Congress. In each of the three analyses, a different treatment group was included as one of the independent variables in the form of a dummy variable where “1” indicated that the participant was in the designated condition and a “0” indicating that they were in the control condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control, ideology, and “all 4” conditions</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>-.514</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal condition only</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-.146</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>188 (total)</td>
<td>-.368</td>
<td>.163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ p = .013 \text{ one-tailed, } H_0: \text{diff} < 0 \]

Table 4.3: T-Test of Approval Differences of Scandal Condition and All Other Conditions
The next four variables in each of the equations were included in the questionnaire given to all participants after they had completed the experimental portion of the study and can be found in their entirety in Appendix C. The first of these variables, designated “understanding of issues” was a question which asked participants how much they agreed with the statement that they have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing the country. There were five response options for this question, which were also used for the next three variables as well, ranging from “strongly agree” with a rating of “1”, to “strongly disagree” with a rating of “5”. The next question, “informed about politics”, asked participants how much they agreed with the statement that they are better informed about politics and government than most people. Both this question and the previous one were designed to tap into how knowledgeable people perceived themselves as being about politics. It should be noted that for both of these questions men tended to rate themselves higher on the scale (meaning that they agreed more with the statements). For the first question, “understanding of issues”, the mean response for males was 2.00 whereas for females it was 2.67. On the second question, “informed about politics”, the mean for males was 2.15 and for females it was 3.06. Differences such as this in responses may have an impact on approval differences so gender was included as a variable in this analysis (where 0=male and 1=female) to control for any such effects.

The next two variables in the equation focused on internal and external efficacy. In the first one, “internal efficacy”, participants were asked to say how much they agreed with the idea that public officials don’t care what people like themselves think (gender differences were not apparent in the responses to this question). For external efficacy the
question was how much they agreed that politics and government was too complicated for people like themselves to understand. Again for this variable, gender had different impacts on answers with males giving a mean response of 3.49 and females 2.75, showing that males believed more so than females that politics and government were not too complicated. The final variable included in the analysis is party identification in which a low score indicates a strong Democrat and a high score indicates a strong Republican. This was included to control for any impact party identification could have on the ratings given for each of the institutions. Particularly for Congress, which is made up of individuals who are very much divided along party lines, it is necessary to control for this variable. The results from the analysis are given below in Table 4.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology articles</td>
<td>-.358</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of issues</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed about politics</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal efficacy</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External efficacy</td>
<td>-.204</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=91, R²=.177</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Explaining Approval Differences in the Ideology Treatment Condition

In this analysis the ideology condition had a statistically significant impact on approval differences, but it was in the opposite direction as expected. A coefficient of negative .358 indicates that participants in the ideology treatment approved of the Court more relative to Congress than those participants in the control condition, thus increasing
the difference between the two approval ratings (which can also be seen in Table 4.1). As discussed above, it appears that participants “punish” Congress, but not the Court, for being ideological.

Of the control variables, neither of the two knowledge ratings was significant but both of the efficacy ratings did have an impact on the dependent variable. The first, internal efficacy, is in the positive direction meaning when participants expressed higher levels of internal efficacy their differences in approval ratings lessened. The opposite effect was found for external efficacy: as people indicated higher levels of external efficacy their approval differences increased. The implication of this is that when people have more faith in their own ability to influence the political system, they see the two institutions as being more similar but when people have faith that the political system is responsive to the interests of people they approve of Congress less, relative to the Court. The last two control variables, party identification and gender, were not significant and apparently had no influence on approval differences.

The next analysis focuses on the impact that the scandal condition had on approval differences once other factors were controlled for. The results are below in Table 4.5.
In the above analysis using the scandal condition, none of the variables attain a level of statistical significance. The treatment condition itself, although not significant, does indicate that participants who read those articles decreased in their difference of approval ratings, as also demonstrated in Table 4.1. Regardless of the reason, which is impossible to discern from this dataset, it seems that similar coverage of the two institutions in terms of ideological conflict has a greater ability to impact approval than the same type of coverage of scandals.

The final analysis, Table 4.6 below, shows the impact of the treatment condition in which participants were asked to read all four of the articles and then respond to the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scandal articles</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of issues</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed about politics</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal efficacy</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External efficacy</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>.995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=92 R²=.085

Table 4.5: Explaining Approval Differences in the Scandal Treatment Condition
Table 4.6: Explaining Approval Differences in Participants who Read All Four Experimental Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All four articles</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of issues</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed about politics</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal efficacy</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External efficacy</td>
<td>-.213</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.899</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=91 R²=.156

In this final regression analysis of the experimental data with approval differences as the dependent variable, the only two variables to reach significance are those measuring internal and external political efficacy. Both of these variables exhibit the same direction and approximate size of coefficients as in Table 4.1. It seems that the impact of having read the ideology articles is not negated when participants read the scandal articles as well. However, the significance of the treatment condition is mitigated to the point that it is no longer significant but the direction is still consistent with that of the ideology condition (indicating a greater difference in approval).

Based on these analyses, it appears that the treatment condition with the greatest impact on approval ratings was the one in which participants read one fictitious news article about an ideological conflict in Congress and one article about the same topic for the Supreme Court. Even though the direction of the change is opposite of what was
expected, it still reveals an interesting relationship between approval of these political institutions and what people read about them. The question that flows naturally from these analyses is how other opinions about the two branches can be affected by media.

As part of the experiment, participants were asked questions regarding their approval levels of the institutions but also related questions about how ethical they believed both elected politicians and Supreme Court justices to be. Table 4.7 displays the mean responses to the question of how ethical experiment participants considered each group. The response options for these questions were “very ethical” (with a rating of one), “somewhat ethical”, “slightly ethical”, “slightly unethical”, “somewhat unethical”, and “very unethical” (with a rating of 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethics Ratings</th>
<th>Control Condition</th>
<th>Ideology Articles</th>
<th>Scandal Articles</th>
<th>All Articles</th>
<th>F-Statistic (Significance Level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. C. Justices</td>
<td>2.109</td>
<td>2.234</td>
<td>2.104</td>
<td>2.340</td>
<td>F=.71 p=.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Politicians</td>
<td>2.870</td>
<td>3.255</td>
<td>3.229</td>
<td>3.362</td>
<td>F=1.94 p=.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Difference</td>
<td>-.761</td>
<td>-1.021</td>
<td>-1.125</td>
<td>-1.022</td>
<td>F=1.17 p=.324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Ethics Differences for Supreme Court Justices and Elected Politicians

It is clear from this table that participants thought of Supreme Court justices as much more ethical than elected politicians, regardless of the condition to which they were assigned. Furthermore, the impact of the articles was much greater for ratings of the elected politicians than it was for justices. There is a marked decrease in how ethical politicians were perceived to be once participants read any of the newspaper articles but
the evidence was much more ambiguous for the justices (and neither of the separate ratings was statistically significant).

In terms of the differences between the means, the control condition had the *smallest* difference of all four of the conditions. Each of the treatment conditions had over a full point of difference in the mean ratings but those participants who read all four of the experimental articles (as opposed to just two of them) did not demonstrate any greater difference in the mean ratings than the other two treatment groups. Based on this data it does not appear that reading additional newspaper articles had any more impact on perceptions of ethics as reading just some articles and the one-way ANOVA test indicates that the differences between the means is not significant (p=.324).

What is particularly interesting about these results is that even when experimental participants read the ideology articles they viewed elected politicians as being less ethical compared to the control group. When this concept of ideology is made salient for elected politicians, people believe that they are less ethical, but this does not hold true for Supreme Court justices. While there was a slight dip in the ratings of ethics for justices, it did not approach the level that was found for elected politicians. The implication of these data is that the newspaper articles created a negative dip in approval for both institutions, but the effect was magnified when the participants already held negative feelings about a group prior to reading the articles.

Participants were also asked about how much they thought ideology factored into decisions of both elected politicians and Supreme Court justices. On a four-point scale they indicated whether they thought each group factored in ideology “a lot” (with a rating
of one), “a moderate amount”, “a little”, or “not at all” (with a rating of four). The results are displayed below in Table 4.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Ideology</th>
<th>Control Condition</th>
<th>Ideology Articles</th>
<th>Scandal Articles</th>
<th>All Articles</th>
<th>F-Statistic (Significance Level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. C. Justices</td>
<td>2.043</td>
<td>1.851</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td>1.872</td>
<td>F=1.84 p=.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Politicians</td>
<td>1.978</td>
<td>1.745</td>
<td>1.646</td>
<td>1.638</td>
<td>F=2.16 p=.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Difference</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>F=.40 p=.754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.8: One-Way ANOVA Test of Mean Differences for How Much Ideology is Considered in Decisions**

In this analysis, across all of the experimental conditions, participants judged that the Supreme Court considered ideology less in their decisions than did elected politicians (with a positive difference of the means indicating that the Supreme Court factors ideology into their decisions less than do members of Congress), but this difference was not statistically significant. Participants assigned to read the ideology articles rated both groups lower (meaning that they thought ideology was factored in to a greater extent) than the control groups did, but the difference in the means increased in size, meaning that there was a greater change for ratings of elected politicians than there was for Supreme Court justices. While the changes in the differences of the means were not significant, the changes in just the ratings of elected politicians did change significantly (p=.095). It was expected that the treatment conditions would cause participants to view the two branches in more similar ways but, based on these data, it had the opposite effect.
Across each of these questions, negative feelings increased after participants read the experimental newspaper articles when compared with the control group. The purpose of the experiment was to measure the changes of approval that would accompany news coverage that was similar for the two institutions. Instead of decreasing the difference in approval ratings, it stayed very much the same but both institutions were rated lower. The same phenomenon held true for questions regarding ethics and ideology. It seems that when issues that are generally considered negative by Americans are made salient, they negatively impact responses. Instead of viewing the two institutions as being fairly similar with regard to these topics, the participants “penalized” them both.

One of the main goals of the survey, to be analyzed in the next chapter, was to collect data from respondents who were as close to a representative sample of the country as possible given financial constraints, so the respondents came from a relatively wide variety of backgrounds compared to the sample of students used for the experiment. It is therefore possible that one or more factors that differentiated the respondents of the survey, such as age or educational background, were limited among the experimental participants. For example, the average age of experiment participants was 20.51 with a standard deviation of 2.04 whereas in the survey of Ohioans the average age was 47.16 with a standard deviation of 16.77. When asked how many hours per week each person spent reading daily newspapers experiment participants gave an average answer of 1.48 with a standard deviation of 1.83 whereas the survey respondents read an average of 4 hours per week with a standard deviation of 5.8. These two examples show that on key variables, there are large differences between the two samples thus making generalizations from the student sample problematical.
There was such a large difference between the approval levels of the two samples that it seems likely that characteristics of each of the samples themselves created the differences. For example, it is possible that some of the difference could be attributed to the variations of experiences that the two samples had in responding to the questions. One sample, the survey of Ohioans, completed the survey in their own homes over the telephone whereas the other sample, the control group of the experiment, completed a written questionnaire in a laboratory environment. It is possible that these differences could have created some changes in the way people processed the questions, but there is no apparent reason why there would be a systematic difference in responses. Remedies for these potential problems that could be addressed in future research will be discussed at greater length in the last chapter.

This chapter has tested the hypotheses concerning the impact of media coverage on approval of the Supreme Court and Congress. H6 suggested that there are more negative stories about Congress than there are for the Court, and the content analysis supports this theory. In defining negative coverage as stories that focus on scandal or ideological debate within the institution, this research found that there was a slightly greater proportion of stories written about Congress focusing on ideological debate than for the Court for the same time period in the newspaper *USA Today*. The difference was much larger for scandal articles, with the Court having none of this type of story published about it and Congress having several.

H7 predicted that as people are exposed to more news media, their approval of Congress will decrease relative to Court approval. In testing the corollary to this hypothesis, the experimental analysis examines whether or not similar types of news
coverage will result in more similar levels of institutional approval. Experimental participants who read two articles, one concerning Congress and one concerning the Supreme Court, that were about ideological conflict showed a greater difference in their approval levels than the control condition. This was the opposite of what was predicted. Participants reading scandal articles however, did demonstrate the expected decrease in approval differences, indicating that only certain types of stories had the predicted effect on approval. Further analysis revealed that both internal and external efficacy had an impact on approval levels for people in the ideology and the “all four” conditions. Higher levels of internal efficacy were associated with smaller differences in approval levels whereas external efficacy had the opposite effect on approval.

Finally, each of the experimental conditions was tested to see if there was a link between the articles read and how ethical both Supreme Court justices and elected politicians were perceived to be, and how much both of these groups considered ideology when making decisions. For both of these analyses, a statistically significant difference of the means among the experimental conditions was not found. This implies that similar news coverage of the two institutions does not have an impact on these evaluations.

The next chapter will focus on the analysis of the survey data, with emphasis on the impact that civics classes have on approval level differences. It is expected that civics classes will increase approval for the Supreme Court while also lowering approval for Congress, thereby magnifying the overall difference between the two institutions. People’s level of exposure to news media will also be considered with the expectation that when people read or watch news coverage their approval levels are affected in a similar manner.
As mentioned in chapter three, these survey data were collected from a random sample of adults living throughout the state of Ohio\textsuperscript{1}. Because the sample represents all adults living in the geographic area, as opposed to a more homogenous segment of the population, it provides the best method to accurately assess the relationship between public opinion and education and media exposure in the United States.

**Description of Variables**

For the purposes of these analyses, three different dependent variables were created. The first measured approval levels of the Supreme Court, the second measured approval of Congress, and the third measured the difference between the two. The Supreme Court approval variable was measured on a 6-point scale with “1” meaning strong approval of the Court and “6” meaning strong disapproval. The distribution of this variable is shown in Table 5.1 and includes all of the respondents (n=440) who were able

\textsuperscript{1} The state of Ohio does not require college students to take a civics course, although it is likely that many, if not most, do before they graduate. At the high school level, students are required to take such a course before graduating.
and willing to give their opinion. As expected, respondents had fairly high approval levels for the Court, with the modal category being “somewhat approve”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Rating</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Strongly Approve</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>21.36</td>
<td>21.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Somewhat Approve</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>39.77</td>
<td>61.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Slightly Approve</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td>74.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Slightly Disapprove</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>79.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Somewhat Disapprove</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>91.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Strongly Disapprove</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Supreme Court Approval Rating Distribution

The same scale was also used for the Congress approval variable and the distribution is shown in Table 5.2 below. For this variable, 452 respondents gave an opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Rating</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Strongly Approve</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Somewhat Approve</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>42.38</td>
<td>51.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Slightly Approve</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>63.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Slightly Disapprove</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>72.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Somewhat Disapprove</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>88.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Strongly Disapprove</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Congress Approval Rating Distribution
By comparing the two distributions, it is easy to see that, as was expected, overall approval ratings are higher for the Supreme Court than they are for Congress, even though the modal category was also “somewhat approve”. These differences were statistically significant at .000, through the use of a t-test, as can be seen below in Table 5.3. In the table collapsed versions of the approval scales are used with “1” indicating approval and “2” indicating disapproval of the institution.

The correlation between the two approval variables was also included as part of the analysis and came out to a Pearson’s r of .437, indicating that the two variables are moderately correlated. This implies, and will be tested by the later analyses, that some, but certainly not all, of the same factors that influence Court approval also influence approval of Congress. These factors could be policy related, because both institutions are capable of creating policy through their decisions, and/or include general levels of trust in government. It also implies that there are many factors that contribute to approval levels that are unique to each institution. The expectation of this research is that civics classes and media coverage each contributes differently to approval, with the Supreme Court generally benefiting from both of them while Congress is affected detrimentally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court approval</td>
<td>1.252</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional approval</td>
<td>1.356</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>.245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.000, Ha: diff < 0 Pearson’s r=.437

Table 5.3: T-Test of Supreme Court versus Congressional Approval Levels
In calculating the variable measuring the approval difference between the two institutions, congressional approval ratings were subtracted from the Supreme Court approval ratings. Both of these independent rating scales went from a high of 1, a strong level of approval, to a low of 6, a strong level of disapproval. This resulted in a combined scale where the lower the number the greater the approval difference, with respondents more approving of the Supreme Court. Higher numbers in the combined scale would mean that people approved of Congress more. For an individual, if their combined scale exceeds zero then the person approves of Congress more than the Court but if the number is below zero they approve of the Court more. A score of zero would mean that the person approves of the two institutions to the same degree. Some respondents indicated that they did not know how strongly they felt about one of both of these institutions. Because the purpose of this research is to compare differences in approval ratings, these respondents were dropped from the analysis. Most of the respondents who did not rate one or both of the institutions felt that they did not know enough to form an opinion, and not because they had ambivalent feelings. Out of 550 total respondents, 157 said that they did not know what their level of approval was for one or both of the institutions, leaving a total of 393 responses useable for analysis. The distribution for the variable is shown below in Table 5.4.
Table 5.4: Approval Rating Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress

The above distribution shows that almost 38% approve of the Supreme Court more than they approve of Congress and only about 18% favor Congress more (with about 44% approving of them equally). This finding clearly supports previous research on approval levels. It is also interesting to note that not a single respondent gave the Congress the highest possible approval rating while at the same time giving the Supreme Court the lowest possible approval rating even though the reverse was true for five of the respondents. As indicated in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, about 12% of the respondents gave
Congress the lowest rating while only about 9% gave the Supreme Court the lowest rating. A similar pattern emerges for the highest rating in that Congress garnered only 9% of respondents but the Supreme Court had 21%.

While there are distinct patterns of approval for both branches, other factors may have an impact that would drastically modify them. The two most likely variables that could have such an impact are party identification and gender. Congress is generally perceived as a much more ideological branch for many reasons, such as the way Congress is formally divided and its election procedures. Since Republicans currently control both houses, people who are Republican could conceivably approve of Congress more than Independents or Democrats. Similar logic can be applied to gender. More women tend to be Democrats, which may affect approval differences. The following two tables display the relationship between these variables and approval differences. Table 5.5 shows that Republicans, Independents, and Democrats all approve of the Court at higher levels than they approve of Congress. Considering that Congress was controlled by the Republicans during the time that the survey was conducted it is surprising that Republicans still viewed the Supreme Court more favorably. It seems that factors other than party identification have a substantial impact on how each institution is perceived.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>-.650</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-.286</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>-.264</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: Mean Approval Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress by Political Party
A pattern different from what was expected emerges when males are compared to females as shown in Table 5.6 below. Males seem to approve of the Court at a slightly higher rate than do females, even though both groups approve of the Court more than they approve of Congress. However, because the difference between the genders is only about one-tenth of a point, it appears as though the means are very similar to one another. One thing that is certain is that, regardless of their demographic characteristics, people approve of the Supreme Court more than they approve of Congress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>-.462</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>-.374</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6: Mean Approval Differences of the Supreme Court and Congress by Gender

Bivariate Analyses of Supreme Court Approval Levels

The following analyses show the effects that specific types of civics classes had on approval levels. In Table 5.7, Supreme Court approval was used as the dependent variable, with “1” representing strongest approval and “6” representing strongest disapproval. The table shows that there is a statistically significant difference ($p=.066$) in approval levels between people who had taken zero or one civics classes at the elementary or high school level and those people who had taken two or more classes at either or both of these levels. The people with more civics classes in this analysis show greater levels of approval, implying that just one class, and/or no classes, does not lead to higher approval levels of the Court than multiple classes. This evidence supports the first hypothesis and is a good indication that civics classes have an impact on approval for the
Court. This relationship will also be tested more stringently in the regression section of this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>2.925</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>2.660</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>440 (total)</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.066 one-tailed, Ha: diff > 0*

Table 5.7: Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the Elementary and High School Levels

The next analysis addresses the second hypothesis which predicts that people who have taken two or more advanced civics classes (meaning at the college or graduate level) will have lower approval levels than those who have taken zero or one classes or only classes at lower educational levels (such as high school and elementary school). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5.8 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>2.830</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.397</td>
<td>.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>440 (total)</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.993 one-tailed, Ha: diff < 0*

Table 5.8: Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College and Graduate Levels
The data indicate that people who have taken at least two classes at the college level do not have lower levels of approval than people with less experience (p=.993). It appears as though more civics classes may even be associated with an even higher level of approval of the Supreme Court. This is exactly opposite of the pattern that was predicted. Theoretically, when people have had advanced civics courses they recognize that Supreme Court justices are political actors just as much as members of Congress are, and that approval levels would reflect this by decreasing approval of the Court, but the data do not support this theory. This may be because the theory is mis-specified in that it takes more than just undergraduate college classes for the hypothesized trend to manifest. Unfortunately, given the low number of respondents who had taken civics classes at the graduate level, it is impossible to test whether or not this trend exists at the graduate level. With enough data from this type of respondent, further tests could be run to see if they approve of the Court less than those people with only undergraduate education and until that time it would be premature to dismiss this theory.

Despite the evidence which suggests more civics classes yields higher approval of the Court, this pattern may be relegated to only those with some college experience, as opposed to respondents with a college or advanced degree. Because they did not obtain a four-year degree, they would likely not have been exposed to more advanced topics within the civics classes they chose. Tables 5.9 and 5.10 disaggregate the sample to only include respondents with “some college” experience (Table 5.9) and to only include respondents with a four-year or more advanced degree (Table 5.10).
Table 5.9: Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College” Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.733</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.321</td>
<td>.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>118 (total)</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p=.123$ one-tailed, 
$Ha: \text{diff} > 0$

Table 5.10: Approval of the Supreme Court by Civics Classes Taken at the College Levels for Respondents with College Degree(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.744</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.423</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>168 (total)</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p=.075$ one-tailed, 
$Ha: \text{diff} > 0$

The data indicate that both groups (those with just some college experience and those with a college degree) show an increase in their approval levels for the Supreme Court with more civics classes, however only the analysis using respondents with college degrees was significant. These tables indicate that greater levels of exposure to civics topics at the college level increase approval ratings for the Supreme Court, but this effect only definitively occurs for people with college degrees. The analysis using only respondents with some college yielded only 28 data points for those who had taken 2 or
more classes, making it very difficult to achieve significant results. Future research could repeat this analysis using a dataset with more people in this category to reach a more definitive conclusion. In a similar vein, the hypothesis that approval levels will decrease when people are more knowledgeable about the workings of the Court may still be correct but cannot be tested with this dataset because of the lack of respondents with graduate school experience.

**Bivariate Analyses of Congressional Approval Levels**

The next analysis looks at how congressional approval is affected by civics classes. As discussed in chapter two, classes at this level teach students more about the processes that are essential to the legislative branch, such as how a bill becomes a law, the committee system, filibusters, and other aspects of Congress that serve to highlight ideological differences among the members and at the same time make Congress seem less effective. Being aware of these conflicts is hypothesized to decrease approval in Congress. Unlike at the college level, most courses will cover the topics at about the same level of depth, which is why the focus here is on the difference between no civics classes and some civics classes. Table 5.11 shows that there is no statistically significant difference (p=.819) between people who have had at least one high school level civics class and those who have not, as predicted in hypothesis three.
Table 5.11: Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at High School or Above (0 vs. 1+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 civics classes</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>3.238</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or more civics classes</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>3.098</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (total)</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p=.819 one-tailed, Ha: diff < 0

The data from Table 5.11 do not support the third hypothesis, but it could be that having only taken one civics class is not enough to create the effect. With this in mind, an analysis was conducted comparing people who had taken zero or one civics class at the high school level or above, with those who had taken two or more. The results shown in Table 5.12 demonstrate a similar pattern as in Table 5.11 between approval levels and civics classes. Once again the results are not statistically significant (p=.862) which suggests that the hypothesis is incorrect in its theory about the relationship between civics classes and congressional approval.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>3.234</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.069</td>
<td>.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>453 (total)</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p=.862 one-tailed, Ha: diff < 0

Table 5.12: Approval of Congress by Number of Civics Classes Taken at High School or Above (0-1 vs. 2+)

To better assess the third hypothesis, the above analysis was repeated but respondents who had not had a formal education above the high school level were left out of the sample and the remaining sample was divided between people who had “some college” and people with college degrees. The reason for doing this is to see if this impact is only evident among respondents with higher overall levels of education in and to be able to compare the results with those for Supreme Court approval. Whether or not a person took a civics course at the college level, merely having at least some college experience may encourage more negative thoughts about Congress. Tables 5.13 and 5.14 below display these analyses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3.152</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td>.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>122 (total)</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( p = .593 \) one-tailed, \( Ha: \) diff > 0

Table 5.13: Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3.174</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.037</td>
<td>.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>173 (total)</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( p = .286 \) one-tailed, \( Ha: \) diff > 0

Table 5.14: Approval of Congress by Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with College Degrees

Unlike the analyses of Supreme Court approval, those measuring congressional approval by respondents who had either some college or a college degree were not statistically significant. It appears as though civics education, regardless of the level at which it occurred or how much overall education a respondent had, does not have a significant impact on congressional approval levels.
These tables show that there is no evidence to conclude that civics classes increase approval levels of Congress, but they do not indicate that classes decrease approval either. Students are much more likely to know more about Congress than the Supreme Court because of its continued presence in the news if for no other reason. Having higher levels of knowledge on any given topic has been connected to a person being more resistant to other influences (Eagly and Chaiken 1993) than lower levels of knowledge. Therefore this data could be reflecting this trend; because people tend to know more about Congress than the Supreme Court, their opinions are less likely to change with more education.

**Bivariate Analyses of Differences between Supreme Court and Congressional Approval Levels**

The fourth and fifth hypotheses focus on the difference in approval levels of the two institutions and its relationship with education. Tables 5.15 and 5.16 test these theories by investigating whether there is a statistically significant difference between people who have taken two or more civics classes at the high school and college levels and people who have taken zero or one class at these levels. The dependent variable for these analyses is the difference in approval levels of the two institutions, as discussed in the “Description of Variables” section of this chapter.
Table 5.15: Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes at the High School Level or Below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>-.495</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>393 (total)</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p=.045 one-tailed, Ha: diff > 0

Table 5.16: Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes at the College Level or Above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>-.339</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>-.644</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>393 (total)</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p=.946 one-tailed, Ha: diff < 0

Table 5.15 analysis gives support to the fourth hypothesis by showing that there is a greater difference in approval levels between respondents who have taken zero or one civics class and those who have taken two or more at the high school and elementary levels. This change is statistically significant, falling well below that .10 level for one-tailed tests. The fifth hypothesis, however, was not confirmed by Table 5.16. It predicted that approval difference would decrease when people had two or more civics classes.
classes at the college or graduate levels. However, the difference did not decrease and actually appeared to increase. The level of significance for the approval difference decrease was obviously not significant reaching, in a one-tailed test, .946.

This unexpected outcome disconfirms the hypothesis that approval differences of the two institutions decrease when people have had a few civics classes at the college level. Future research could focus on the relationship between civics and approval at the graduate level. Because of the limited number of respondents who had taken civics classes at this level, it is not possible to test this relationship here.

In the interest of thoroughly testing the relationship between civics classes and approval difference, the number of civics classes was next tested without regard to level of education. Specifically, the differences between “low”, “moderate”, and “high” numbers of classes were compared to see if a pattern emerged about how the number of classes affects approval differences. For the purposes of this analysis, “low” is defined as zero or one civics class and “moderate” is defined as two, three, or four civics classes. The anticipated result is that people with a moderate number of classes will have a greater difference in their approval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 3, or 4 civics classes</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>-.235</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>217 (total)</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ p=.275 \text{ one-tailed, } \\
\text{Ha: diff > 0} \]

Table 5.17: Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes (0 or 1 vs. 2, 3, or 4)
Table 5.18: Difference in Approval by Number of Civics Classes
(2, 3, or 4 vs. 5 or more)

Table 5.17 shows that the people with a moderate number of classes do approve of the Court at a higher rate relative to how much they approve of Congress. It also shows that when people have taken a moderate number of civics classes, the difference in approval levels is higher than for those who have only taken basic classes, as is predicted in the fourth hypothesis. Even though this difference is not statistically significant (p=.275) it still supports the hypothesis in finding that civics classes encourage students to look more favorably upon the Supreme Court relative to Congress and that this effect increases as students move from the basic classes to the intermediate ones.

The second table (5.18) measures the difference of approval levels for those with a moderate number of classes and those with a high number of classes, as discussed in the fifth hypothesis. “High” is defined here as having taken five or more civics classes. The predicted result is that people taking a high number of classes would exhibit a smaller difference in their approval levels. The data still indicate that all respondents approved of the Court at higher levels than they approved of Congress, but it also indicates that the
difference in approval *increases* when the respondents had taken advanced courses. Hypothesis five predicts that the difference would *decrease* as students realize that the Supreme Court is a political institution just as Congress but this was not significant at only $p=.985$. This could mean that the relationship between approval and civics courses is a linear one in that as people take more and more civics classes their approval ratings of the Court continue to increase relative to their approval of Congress, or it could mean that only students of the most advanced civics courses show a pattern of a small size in their approval differences. As previously discussed, very few respondents indicated that they had taken courses at the graduate level so a substantive analysis based on this group is not possible with this dataset.

As was tested separately with Court and congressional approval, the next two analyses look at the impact college civics has on people with only “some college” experience and those who have completed at least a four-year college degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>-.321</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-.852</td>
<td>.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>105 (total)</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p=.083$ one-tailed, Ha: diff > 0

Table 5.19: Approval Difference by Number of Civics Classes Taken at the College Level for Respondents with “Some College”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1 civics classes</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>-.339</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more civics classes</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>-.644</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>393 (total)</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p=.054 one-tailed, Ha: diff &gt; 0</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.20: Approval Difference by Civics Classes Taken at the College Levels for Respondents with College Degrees**

In one-tailed t-tests, both Tables 5.19 and 5.20 indicate that people who take two or more civics classes at the college level, whether they finished their degree or not, have a greater difference in their approval levels than respondents with only one or no civics classes. It is much less likely that a person with only some college experience would have taken in-depth civics classes than a person who completed a degree. Because respondents with only some college also exhibited the relationship, it implies that people do not have to take high-level college courses for this effect to take place.

**Regression Analyses of Approval Levels**

The independent variables used for the analyses measured civic class experience and media exposure of respondents. For the first of these variables, the number of civics classes taken at the elementary and/or high school levels was combined to create a single variable with the lowest response given being zero and the highest response given being ten. Three-fourths of the respondents indicated that they had taken between zero and four classes with only the remaining quarter claiming to have had more than four civics.
classes by high school. A person asserting that they had taken ten civics classes by the end of their high school career seems to be an exaggerated number, but those respondents claiming to have had ten civics classes comprised less than two percent of the sample. Therefore, even if these respondents inaccurately described their true experiences with civics classes, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the results.

The elementary and high school levels were combined for this variable because the hypotheses do not differentiate between them. The way that civics classes are taught at these two levels is likely to be very similar. Neither level is likely to offer in-depth coverage of either institution so there is no reason to separate them in the analyses.

The next variable used in the regression was dichotomous and measured whether people had taken zero or one civics class at the undergraduate college level, or if they had taken two or more. The reason for collapsing the data into two categories is that, at the college level, students taking more than one class are going to be exposed to much more substantive detail than the students who only took one class. It is highly likely that respondents who only had one class in college took an introductory course. These classes are fairly similar regarding depth at which the Supreme Court and Congress are discussed. It therefore seemed that the best assessment of the impact of college level courses on approval levels would be to create this dichotomous variable\(^2\). The final education variable in the model measured how approval levels are affected by

---

\(^2\) When the ordinal-level version, as opposed to the dichotomous version, of this variable is used in the regression, the coefficient no longer is statistically significant, as described in the full model found in Table 5.11, and becomes -.080 with a p value of .287. This is because those who had taken zero or one class at the college level were then treated as being substantively different even though, according to the theory, there should be no difference between them.
respondents who have taken advanced civics courses at the graduate level. The responses
given ranged from a low of zero to “more than four”.

The last two substantive variables included in this analysis measured people’s
exposure to media. Respondents were asked to give an estimate of how many hours they
spent reading newspapers per week, and how much time they spent watching television
news each day. Both of these measures were included in the analysis. Because the
correlation between the two variables is only .0169, there is no problem with collinearity.

When the respondents were asked how much time they spent reading the
newspaper each week, they were allowed to supply any numerical answer that they
wished to give as long as it was in hours. Because of this, the range in responses went
from zero to sixty hours per week. Some of the numbers in the upper range seemed
improbable so the scale was recoded to have nine responses, zero hours through eight
hours and above. In the original scale over 90% of the responses were given as eight
hours per week or less so the vast majority of the scale was not recoded.

Three control variables, age, party identification, and overall educational level,
were also used in this analysis to account for various influences that were likely to affect
the results and contribute to the dependent variable. Age is a standard control variable
because it often has a large impact on opinions, regardless of the topics. In this analysis
it was particularly important to include age because civic class experience may have a
grater influence on younger respondents because they would have taken the classes more
recently. Therefore, to ensure that any significant results are not the product of this
effect, age was controlled for. Respondents of this survey ranged in age from 18 (the
minimum age to be eligible for completing the survey) to 91 with the average age being 47.

Party identification was used as another control variable because the area of interest is, by definition, politically oriented. Therefore, it was necessary to control for respondents’ political persuasions. It would only make sense that Republicans would have higher approval levels for both institutions, Congress in particular, since conservatives in general and Republicans specifically have dominated at least the elected branches of government in recent years3. Party identification was measured on a seven-point scale with one representing people classifying themselves as strong Republicans and seven representing strong Democrats and four representing Independents.

The last control variable, education, was measured by asking respondents what was the highest level of education that they had completed. This measurement also allowed respondents to indicate that they had completed “some high school” or “some college” even if they had not completed the degree. The purpose in controlling for overall educational level was to ensure that if civics classes were found to have an impact on approval levels, that impact could be attributed to the civics classes themselves and not merely level of education. Other control variables, such as race or income, were not included because there was no theoretical justification for including them so, for the sake of parsimony, they were left out of the analysis.

To discern the patterns associated with each of the variables and approval levels of the two institutions separately, regression analyses were performed for both the Supreme Court and Congress. A final analysis was also conducted that focused on the


**difference** in approval levels. The two separate OLS regression analyses that were conducted used approval of the Supreme Court and the approval of Congress as the respective dependent variables, as shown below in Tables 5.21 and 5.22. These next three analyses are intended to provide data for the seventh hypothesis as well as provide an overall model explaining approval levels of the two institutions separately and explaining what factors contribute to the persistent **differences** in public opinion. The significant values listed in each of the regression analyses represent two-tailed tests. Because the independent variables are expected to influence the dependent variable in a specific direction, they can be interpreted using a one-tailed test, meaning that the standard level of significance that these variables must reach to confirm the hypotheses is .10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at elementary and/or high school levels</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more civics classes at college level</td>
<td>-.376</td>
<td>.213</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at graduate level</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent watching television news</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent reading newspaper</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=355, R²=.041

**Table 5.21 Explaining Approval Levels of the Supreme Court**

---

3 The Supreme Court has been almost equally divided in recent years but with a leaning toward conservatism.
In this regression analysis, the only substantive variable to reach statistical significance is whether the respondent had two or more civics classes at the undergraduate college level or not. This finding is in the negative direction meaning that if a person had taken two or more of these classes then they would tend to approve of the Court at a higher rate than someone who had taken no classes or just one class.

In terms of the other variables, civics classes taken relatively early do not have a significant impact on approval ratings of the Supreme Court one way or another. The direction indicated by the data is negative meaning that with more classes at these levels there is a higher approval level but the significance level is too high (.395) for the variable to have any substantive meaning. For classes taken at the graduate level, the number of respondents (< 20) is still too low for any statistically significant level to be reached. With the current dataset it is not possible to understand the effect that the most advanced classes have on approval.

These media variables were also not statistically significant but may imply that because with so little coverage of the Supreme Court it is difficult for there to be any kind of impact. Not only is there less coverage but there is a smaller range of topics that are covered compared to the issues reported in congressional coverage (the vast majority of which focus on procedural aspects of the Court process as opposed to discussion of substantive issues). Given these constraints, it was foreseeable that this variable would not be significant in the Supreme Court regression.

Of the control variables, age was positively significant at the .01 level so that as people age they approve of the Court less. An explanation for this is that when civics classes are fresher in people’s minds, the things learned in those classes, such as the
emphasis on upholding the civil rights and liberties of citizens, are likely to have a greater impact than they would for others. Therefore people directly out of college, for example, would approve of the Court more than older respondents provided that they had taken some civics classes during that time. Another possible explanation is that as people age, they experience more of the Court’s opinions which are contrary to their own.

Party identification was a control variable expected to be significant but it did not even approach any generally accepted level of significance. This may be because people tend to see the Supreme Court less as a political institution than the other branches of government which would make party affiliations less important to approval ratings. Perhaps in addition to this explanation, people are less adept at recognizing the ideology of the Court and its members and so are less able to accurately categorize them. As a result, they are less able to align their own political views with the Court’s views. That is not to say that approval levels of elected political institutions are driven solely by a person’s individual partisanship, but there is often a strong connection between the two. Furthermore, the variance of Supreme Court approval was 2.50 with a standard deviation of 1.58 which is fairly high, since it is a 6-point scale. This means that there is enough variation within the approval measure for party identification to be significant but because it is not, it implies that a substantive, not statistical, reason is at fault. Finally, overall levels of education were not significant. This lends more support to the finding that it is the civics content which has more of an impact on Court approval rather than simply the level of education.

In Table 5.22 the same analysis as above was repeated but with approval of Congress as the dependent variable. None of the substantive variables reached statistical
significance. The only variable to approach significance was the how much time respondents spend reading the newspaper each week, which reached .015 and was in the positive direction. This fits the expectations of this research and of the research by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), because as people spend more time reading the newspaper they are being exposed to far more negative stories regarding Congress than positive ones and, unlike coverage of the Supreme Court, most congressional stories have evaluative content as opposed to a simple recitation of the facts.

Both age and party identification were highly significant in this analysis as well. As people age and as people associate themselves less with the Republican Party and/or more with the Democratic Party they are less approving of Congress. Both of these variables are significant but party identification has the largest impact on the dependent variable because of the partisan nature of Congress itself. People can much more easily recognize that Congress is divided between Republicans and Democrats and that this not only affects the structure of Congress but the types of bills it creates. Because it is much easier to see how party politics affects Congress, as opposed to the Supreme Court, party identification has a much greater effect on congressional approval levels than on those for the Supreme Court. Overall education was not a significant factor in explaining congressional approval, just as it was not significant in explaining Court approval.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at elementary and/or high school levels</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more civics classes at college level</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at graduate level</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent watching television news</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent reading newspapers</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=362, R²=.100

The main focus of this research is to determine the factors that contribute to the difference in approval levels of Congress and the Supreme Court. The next analysis performed on this data was a regression model of how both civics classes and media exposure affect approval differences between the Supreme Court and Congress. The results of this full model, which used a standard two-tailed ordinary-least-squares regression, are shown in Table 5.23.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at elementary and/or high school levels</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more civics classes at college level</td>
<td>-.388</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at graduate level</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent watching television news</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent reading newspapers</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-.147</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.659</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=321, R²=.073

Table 5.23: Explaining Differences in Approval Levels between the Supreme Court and Congress

The above analysis shows that as people take more civics classes at the elementary and high school levels they approve of the Court more than they approve of Congress and this difference is statistically significant at the .05 level. This supports the notion that, even at such a low level of education, people who have taken some civics classes approve of the Court more than they approve of Congress and as that number increases the difference in approval levels increases also. To make sure this effect was not a result of the impact of education in general, an education control variable was also included in the analysis and it was nowhere near any level of significance.

The variable measuring college experiences also reaches significance at .088. The coefficient is in the negative direction, meaning that people who have had two or
more classes at the undergraduate level approve of the Court more than they approve of Congress. The coefficient for this variable is also higher than it is for the elementary and high school levels, indicating that the approval differences are even greater at this more advanced level of education. At this point the results strongly indicate that civics classes have a significant impact on approval levels.

The analysis of graduate classes shows that this variable did not have a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. Unfortunately this was to be expected given the extremely low number of responses that were collected on this question. A total of eighteen respondents indicated that they had taken at least one civics course at the graduate level which is certainly not a large enough number to draw any conclusions about this aspect of the hypotheses. With this data it is impossible to test the curvilinear aspect of the hypotheses to find out what the impact of these most advanced courses are on approval levels.

The variable measuring the number of hours spent watching television news was not found to be significant and the coefficient was so small that the direction is irrelevant. However, the other media variable, number of hours spent reading a newspaper, was found to be significant at the .10 level in a negative direction. Therefore as people had more exposure to these news media, they approved of the Supreme Court more than they approved of Congress, which was predicted by the hypotheses. It appears as though reading the newspaper has an impact on public opinion but watching television news does not. This could be related to how much attention is paid to the newspaper versus the television, if people are paying less attention when they watch television. Unfortunately
a question asking how much attention is paid to the newspaper and/or television was not included in the survey so there is no way to measure this concept in this dataset.

For the control variables, age did not achieve a standard level of significance and therefore not have an impact on approval differences. Party identification turned out, not surprisingly, to be significant in the negative direction at the .001 level of statistical significance. This means that as people identify more strongly with the Democratic Party, they approve of the Supreme Court at higher levels than they approve of Congress. The last variable, overall level of education, was again not significant indicating that it is the civics classes that impact approval levels over just absolute levels of education.

It is clear from these analyses that civics classes do have an impact on differences in approval levels, but the findings from Table 5.20 indicate that there is not a difference between low and moderate numbers of classes and moderate and high numbers. Instead the differences seemed to be related to the level at which these classes were taken. In other words, the effect that a few classes taken at the college level has on approval is not the same as the effect that the same number of classes has taken at the high school level, for example. In addition there is limited support for the influence of media coverage on approval. It does appear that reading the newspaper more yields lower approval of the Court than for Congress but watching television does not have a significant effect.

The level of education, while by itself is not significant, does impact the type of civics classes respondents could have been exposed to. For example, someone who did not complete high school would not have taken advanced civics classes, regardless of how many of civics classes they had taken. Therefore the level of overall education may also impact media absorption. In other words, people with higher levels of education
may be affected (in terms of their approval levels) to a greater degree than people with less education. The following two tables explore this concept. The first table repeats the regression analysis of Table 5.23 but uses the approval difference of respondents who did not have formal education beyond high school as the dependent variable. The variables measuring civic education at the college and graduate levels have also been removed from the analysis along with the general education variable. Table 5.25 repeats the analysis but uses approval differences of respondents with undergraduate college education only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at elementary and/or high school levels</td>
<td>-.095</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent watching television news</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent reading newspapers</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-.195</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=96, R²=.099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.24: Explaining Differences in Approval Levels for Respondents with High School Education and Below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of civics classes at elementary and/or high school levels</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more civics classes at college level</td>
<td>-.470</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent watching television news</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent reading newspapers</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=177, R²=.103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.25: Explaining Differences in Approval Levels for Respondents with Undergraduate Experience Only
These two analyses show a great deal of difference between respondents who had only a high school education at most and those with at least some undergraduate college experience. None of the civics or media variables were significant factors for approval differences in the low education group but civics education at both the introductory and the college level were significant as was the number of hours spent reading the newspaper for the college educated group. In terms of the media variable, this could mean that people with college experience pay attention and/or absorb more of the news than people with less education. This would imply that people with moderate levels of education (undergraduate college) are more susceptible to shifts in their approval levels based on the information they absorb from news media. In this dataset information on how much attention was paid while reading the newspaper or watching television was not included, but future research could investigate the link between these factors. The same rationale could be true for the impact of civics classes. People with more education may absorb more from civics classes, thus enabling a significant relationship between civics and approval to manifest. If future research were able to measure levels of classroom absorption, this theory could be tested.

This chapter has tested the hypotheses concerning the relationship between civics classes and approval levels of the Supreme Court and Congress and, to a lesser extent, the relationship between approval and exposure to mass media. First, in testing how civics classes affect approval of the Court, it was found that at that elementary and high school levels, people who took more than one civics class had higher levels of approval. This evidence supports the first hypothesis which predicts just such a pattern. Evidence was not found to support the second hypothesis however, which suggests that very high levels
of civics classes would result in lower levels of Court approval. Further investigation revealed that respondents who had at least a college degree actually continued to increase their approval of the Court as they took more civics classes.

In terms of congressional approval, no evidence was found to support the third hypothesis which predicts that approval will decrease with more civics classes. This remained true even when the sample was divided between those respondents who had a college degree and those who only had “some college”. When the analysis turned to the approval difference between the Supreme Court and Congress support was found for the fourth hypothesis. The hypothesis suggested that at the high school and elementary levels, respondents who had taken more than one civics class would exhibit a greater difference in their approval levels. The fifth hypothesis on the other hand, predicted that approval would decrease when respondents had more than two classes at the college or graduate level.

In order to control for other variables which may be affecting the results obtained in the earlier statistical tests, several regression analyses were performed. In explaining approval levels of the Supreme Court it was found that if a person had two or more civics classes at the college level they were more likely to more approving of the Court. This analysis did not find evidence that media exposure or any other types of civics classes, such as those at the high school level, influenced approval levels. For congressional approval a different pattern emerged. None of the variables representing civics classes were significant but the amount of exposure to newspaper coverage was at p=.020. In addition both age and party identification were significant. When the difference of the two approval levels was used as the dependent variable it was found that more civics
classes, at all levels of education up to graduate school, were associated with higher levels of Court approval relative to congressional approval. The amount of time respondents spent reading the newspaper and their party identification also factored in significantly. Finally, when the sampled respondents were divided by those with only high school education and those with undergraduate experience, it was found that civics classes and media exposure were only significant for those who had gone to college.

The next and final chapter will summarize the findings of this research and discuss the implications for what these conclusions mean about how Americans get their political information. In more general terms, it will close by indicating what this research has contributed to the study of public opinion, in addition to caveats that should be considered when evaluating the findings. Finally, it will suggest some avenues for future research both in terms of how this research could be expanded to related areas of public opinion that were not explored in this work.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This research has helped to further the understanding of public opinion of the Supreme Court and Congress by examining the relationship between approval levels of the institutions and educational experiences and media coverage. In general it has found support for the ideas that the experience of taking civics classes and exposure to media coverage can influence approval levels of the two branches.

Media Coverage

Using newspaper articles from the calendar year 2002, strong evidence shows that Congress is much more the focus of media attention than is the Court. This year was average in terms of both Court cases and congressional activity, which made it likely that the media coverage of the institutions was fairly representative. Findings of this research indicate that coverage of Congress is much more negative overall than is Court coverage because of its focus on ideological conflict and flawed politicians. Coverage about the Supreme Court instead generally focuses on procedural aspects of the Court (such as when the Court agrees to hear a case or when it issues a decision). This difference, while interesting, does not necessarily have an impact on public opinion. To ascertain the nature of the relationship between public opinion and media coverage, a survey was
conducted to ask Ohioans their opinions about these two institutions and their level of 
exposure to news media. This unearthed a relationship that showed when a person has 
higher levels of media exposure (in the form of the amount of time they spent reading a 
daily newspaper each week) they tended to be more supportive of the Court relative to 
Congress. The same relationship was not found between approval levels and the amount 
of time people spent watching television news. One explanation for this is that people 
who watch the news pay less attention while doing so than people who read newspapers. 
Even though they may invest a substantial amount of time watching television news, they 
may not be paying much attention to the news program compared to people who read the 
newspaper. This would also explain why people who read newspapers also tend to 
comprehend the news better than people who watch television (Graber 1988, Robinson 
and Levy 1986). Unfortunately no measure of how much attention is paid when reading 
and/or watching the news was taken during the survey, so it is difficult to gauge whether 
this is the reason or if some other factor is the cause. Future research investigating this 
area could include such measures and compare them for both mediums.

When each of the branches was considered separately it was found that the level 
of media exposure, that is the number of hours spent reading the newspaper, had a 
statistically significant impact on congressional approval levels but not on approval for 
the Court. The data show that as people increase their levels of media exposure, they 
approve of Congress less. This is in keeping with the hypotheses of this research that 
when people have more exposure to the negative news coverage of Congress, their 
approval levels will decline. One reason for why there was no impact on Court approval 
is that the content of the coverage strengthens assessments as opposed to changing them.
People already have positive impressions of the Court and the news coverage reinforces those perceptions. Another reason that no significant results were obtained for the Supreme Court is because there is relatively so much more coverage of Congress that it is difficult for people to be affected by coverage of the Court. With so little coverage, people are not likely to experience lasting changes in their opinions.

The findings support the hypotheses very well but it is necessary to measure the weight of the results by their caveats. The most significant caveat to discuss is that media exposure was measured here in terms of newspaper reading and television watching and did not include other news media sources. Furthermore it did not specify what type of television news (network versus cable) respondents were watching. Twenty-four hour news stations, such as CNN, cover the news in a style that is very different from either network television news or newspapers\(^1\) and it is unclear what, if any, impact the type of television news watched could have on approval levels. The internet represents another news source which is becoming more important to news seekers and again is very different from any of the other news sources mentioned here. People are able to select the stories that they find most interesting and can easily get either an in-depth or a cursory view of the issues. As its use increases, the potential of the internet to affect political opinions will grow as well. Currently it is difficult to say how using these alternative sources would affect public opinion. Their format is so unlike those of more traditional news media outlets it is possible that there would be a difference in how people and their opinions are affected. Future research could find people who used

\(^1\) CNN is able to cover a larger number of stories than network news partly due to fewer time constraints and partly because of its use of a news ticker, which continually scrolls across the bottom of the screen. It is also able to report the news on a timelier basis than either network news or newspapers.
different media sources as their primary news sources and compare their opinions on a variety of issues.

Another caveat to consider regarding the media-related results is that some people responding to the survey seemed confused by the question asking them about how many hours each week they spent reading the newspaper. This was not the case when respondents were asked how many hours per day they spent watching television news. Some answers ranged upwards of forty hours per week which suggests that either people did not understand the question or they had no concept of how much time they actually spent reading the newspaper. Either of these situations is troublesome. Additionally, based on my experience monitoring interviews as they were taking place, some respondents had difficulty with multiplying the average amount of time they read the newspaper in a single day by the number of days per week they typically read the paper. Often this meant that the respondent had to multiply some amount of time by seven. However, because this question was framed in the standard format it is unlikely that these problems are rare in survey research. My impression from monitoring the interviews was that respondents who had difficulty in coming up with a number seemed to reach an answer that was consistent with other things they had said throughout the interview. This leads me to believe that the answer given was not far from the truth. As far as those respondents giving excessively high answers, these people constituted only a small minority of the total sample and to ensure that those responses did not overly skew the results a cap was placed on the range of acceptable answers in the analysis.

In addition to the survey and content analysis section of this research that was used to assess the impact of media coverage on public opinion, it was also tested in the
form of an experiment. Newspaper stories were altered to see if approval levels would adjust if there was a change in the way each of the branches were portrayed in the media. The expected result was that those exposed to the experimental conditions would approve of the Court less and/or would have higher levels of approval for Congress, because the news stories were constructed in such a way so to make them as similar as possible in the topics and in the way each branch was discussed in terms of language used and degree of negativity. Despite the predictions, these expected relationships did not materialize. There was a statistically significant difference between the means of the experimental groups, but they fluctuated in how large the approval difference was in comparison with the control group. Those participants who read the ideology articles or all four of the articles exhibited a greater difference in their approval levels while those who only read the scandal articles showed a smaller difference. The implication is that participants essentially punish members of Congress for being ideological, even though the current political system in Congress is based on the political party affiliation, but do not respond to the Supreme Court justices in the same way. It also seems that the reverse is true in areas of scandal and corruption. Participants punished Supreme Court justices with lower approval but did not similarly punish members of Congress. Future research could explore this relationship between ideology and disapproval for elected bodies. It would be interesting to explore the limits of this pattern to see what types of political offices are “punished” for being ideological and the severity of the punishment.

Participants in the experiment were also asked how ethical they perceived both elected politicians and Supreme Court justices to be in addition to how much both groups consider ideology when making decisions. The change in the differences between the
means did move in the expected direction. Participants who read the scandal articles did think that both groups were less ethical than did the control group, but the people reading the ideology articles viewed both groups as being less ethical as well. The same pattern emerged when participants were asked how much they thought each group considered ideology in their decisions. Neither of these findings approached levels of statistical significance, but there are several possible reasons for a lack of statistically significant results in these areas, some of which could be addressed in future research.

The first reason is that each participant in the experiment was exposed to the treatment only once. The survey findings revealed that as people have more exposure to mass media the difference in their approval levels increases. From this, it seems logical that multiple exposures to the experimental conditions would be more likely to result in a change of approval levels. If this experiment were to be repeated, it would be beneficial to expose participants to altered media coverage at several different points over a period of time.

The experiment may also have yielded stronger results had the participants not been expecting to be deceived. From my conversations with several participants who had been assigned to one of the treatment groups after they had completed the experiment, I determined that many were expecting to be deceived because they had been told that it was a possibility and because of their own experiences in similar sorts of studies. The Institutional Review Board requires that all potential participants be forewarned that deception may be involved in the studies in which they participate. Even though this has been deemed necessary in all cases where there is any form of deception, it alerts the students to this immediately. What makes this a particular problem is that many of these
students have participated, either that same quarter or previously in their college career, in other studies. Because of the requirement of full disclosure at the end of the experiment, each participant is fully aware of all the deceptions they have experienced and they expect, correctly, that this study will also involve deception. This situation does not assure that participants’ responses on the questionnaires are different than they would otherwise be, but the possibility exists. For example, participants could disregard the articles entirely when filling out the questionnaire, because they believe it is based in deception, or they may be able to guess, at least in part, the true purpose of the study which could again lead to different questionnaire responses, consciously or subconsciously. Although I do not believe that this particular caveat had a significant impact on the results in this study, it is possible. Unfortunately, given the constraints put in place by the IRB on this type of research, it is a necessary part of the research to notify the respondents of the possibility of deception. One possible way to minimize the problem would be to only use students who had not previously participated in another experiment. This would ensure that students had not had multiple experiences of being deceived and may be less likely to expect it.

The final factor which may have prevented stronger findings in the experiment was the satisficing of the participants. The participants, due to the nature of how they were recruited, are not likely to be interested in giving the best possible answers on the questionnaire, and so are highly likely to satisfice. In this case, exposure to a treatment condition would be unlikely to have an effect simply because the participant does not care about the topic at all. In fact, any given participant’s overriding concern in this study was likely to be the extra credit. Completing the questionnaire and, in the
treatment condition, reading the news articles, in as quick a manner as possible is likely to be the extent of their effort. Some of the participants read through the articles so fast it is questionable if they absorbed, or even registered, the information that the articles conveyed. Satisficing is also generally a problem with surveys but in a telephone survey, respondents are constrained by the pace of the interviewer in how fast they can finish the survey.

For future research, one way in which the experiment could be expanded would be to incorporate more experimental conditions. This research used three treatment conditions which allowed participants to read all four of the articles, two articles (one concerning the Court and the other concerning Congress) that focused on ideological debate, or two articles that focused on a scandal in each of the institutions. More conditions could have been created that required participants to read about just one of the institutions, which would have allowed the effects that articles of either the Court or Congress to be isolated from one another. Another possible addition would be a control group that had participants read news articles not related to either branch to see if political stories in general would have an impact on approval levels. This would test if negative stories about various aspects of government, unrelated to the Court or Congress, could have an impact on approval ratings. Unfortunately, due to constraints on both time and resources, these further experimental conditions were not possible for this research, but they could be beneficial to this line of research in increasing understanding of public opinion of government.
Civics Classes

The other half of this study focused on educational experiences and how they impact approval levels of the two institutions. In general it was found that as people take increasing numbers of civics education classes they approved more of the Court relative to Congress. More specifically, when people had taken classes at the high school level or earlier, the approval increased in that people approved of the Court more. When people took these classes at the college level the same phenomenon was found. It was also predicted that this relationship would be curvilinear in that when people had taken civics courses at the highest levels (for example graduate school) this difference in approval levels would decrease, but the data used did not support this theory.

Even though the curvilinear aspect of the hypotheses was not supported by the data, I do not think that the theory is invalid. One characteristic of this dataset was that there were only a very small number of respondents who had taken the most advanced civics classes. It was to be expected that not very many people would have had this experience due to the nature of the dataset (a random telephone sampling of households in the state of Ohio), but it was not expected that the number would be so low as to essentially prevent any meaningful analysis to be conducted on the hypothesis. If this research were to be repeated, an oversample of highly educated people could be used which would likely greatly increase the number of people with advanced civics courses in the dataset. This could be accomplished by recruiting current graduate students to participate in a survey or by creating a sample from a list of previous graduate students from an academic institution. Another method would be to use a targeted sample that focused on geographic areas and specific neighborhoods that have higher levels of
education in general, which is information available through the 2000 census data. This could then be incorporated into a standard random-digit-dialing survey.

In testing the impact civics classes had on approval levels of just the Supreme Court, this research looked at differences in the number of civics classes at the high school and elementary levels of education. The expectation was that more civics classes would yield higher approval of the Court. The hypothesis was supported by the data in that people with two or more civics class experiences at this education level had higher levels of support than those with less experience. The implication is that as people are exposed to more classes that focus on the virtues of the Court, such as those courses commonly found at these basic levels, their approval levels respond accordingly.

At higher levels of education, it was predicted that approval of the Court would decrease. However, the analysis of civics education found that people who took zero or one civics class at the college and graduate levels approved of the Supreme Court at a lower rate than those who had taken two or more classes at the same levels. This indicates that Court approval is not curvilinear in its relationship with education. In dividing up the sample between respondents who had “just some college” experience and those who had obtained at least a four-year college degree, this same pattern persisted. Because this pattern is the opposite of what was predicted it raises some questions.

One possibility is that it takes more than two classes for approval of the Court to begin to decline. Only 106 total respondents fell into the category of having taken two or more classes at this level. If the analysis were redone to be a comparison between those with zero, one, or two classes and three or more classes, the number in the three or more group would drop dramatically and be too small for any meaningful evaluation to be
made. In other words, the same problem emerges here as discussed above in that a higher number of respondents are needed in this category for more analysis to be done. If this work were to be replicated and more respondents fell into this category, I suspect that the heart of the original hypothesis would hold true, but it would take a higher number of civics classes for the difference in approval levels to be detected. If an effort was made to recruit participants who fell into this category a more definitive answer could be obtained.

With regard to approval levels of Congress, significant results were not achieved when looking at the effect of different numbers and levels of civics education. The evidence did indicate, albeit not at a significant level, that with more civics classes, regardless of the level at which they were taken, approval levels increased for Congress. This is contrary to the hypotheses in that approval was expected to decrease as students were made aware of the ideological and argumentative nature of Congress. Clearly, the hypotheses, and related theories, are wrong with regard to this trend. In future research, alternative theories could be investigated that would help to explain this relationship between approval of Congress and civics classes. One possible explanation is that as students become more familiar with the legislative process, they are less apprehensive of it simply due to that familiarity. In gaining a greater understanding of the necessity of debate and compromise perhaps they realize the ideological nature of Congress serves a purpose. With the current data it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to the rationale for this trend. A more qualitative approach, perhaps utilizing in-depth interviews, would be needed to understand why people with more civics classes approve more highly of Congress.
Of the control variables used in the analyses, one interesting finding was that age proved to be statistically significant in explaining the variance of people’s approval of both the Supreme Court and Congress. In both cases the relationship was in the same direction in that people who were younger approved of the institutions more. Several explanations are possible for this. People who are younger are more likely to have taken civics courses most recently, thereby making the impact of those classes more pronounced. It could also be that as people age they encounter more decisions made by the institution that they disagree with, thereby lowering approval.

Party identification was also found to be significant, but only for approval levels of Congress. Republicans had higher levels of approval for Congress but party affiliation had no impact at all on Court approval. This evidence implies that people see Congress as a much more ideological branch and, even though many Court decisions are based on ideology, justices are not seen as ideological politicians.

Other control variables could also be included in the analysis in future research. In the datasets used there was no measure of political interest or involvement. These variables could have a significant impact if civics classes only affected people who were interested in politics. Perhaps it is only when people care about politics that civics classes have the opportunity to influence approval. If people are not interested and/or are not involved at all in politics, other things they are exposed to, such as news media and civics classes, are less likely to have an impact on perceptions.

In general, a few caveats associated with the survey data should be considered in evaluating the strength of the results. First, the phrase “civics classes” itself presents difficulties. Even though respondents were given a definition of what types of classes
constituted as “civics”\(^2\), it is impossible to know, based on the data, what specific courses they counted among this number. Did respondents interpret this question in very similar ways, or was there a great deal of variation in what was considered to be “civics”? Because there is such a wide range of specific courses available to potential respondents, even when they reside in the same state as they did in this survey, it would be difficult to list them all and have respondents indicate from a comprehensive list which ones they had taken. Obtaining relatively detailed descriptions of the courses respondents took would ensure that only “true” civics courses were being counted and is a possible avenue for future research. It would also have the additional benefit of forcing respondents to think harder about the courses they had taken which may yield a more accurate count. Because, for most respondents, these classes were taken several years in the past, it is likely that mistakes were made in counting how many classes they had taken at various levels of education. By forcing them to think about their answers more, it seems likely that more accurate responses would be obtained.

Another problem with the measurement of civics classes is that a natural selection bias occurs in terms of how many civics classes a person takes during their education. Some states have specific requirements that force students to complete a requisite number of classes before they can graduate from either high school or college. Aside from this restriction, students have a great deal of choice in the classes that they take. If a person was not at all interested in government or civics, it is not likely that they would take a class focusing on this subject unless they were forced. On the other hand, those students

\(^2\) As mentioned in chapter three, the definition of civics classes given to survey respondents was the following: “by civics classes I mean any class you have ever taken that talked about American government or citizenship”.
who take multiple civics classes may have more interest in the subject than most other
people. This could in turn lead them to be more predisposed to absorb the teachings of
these classes which would then yield a larger impact on approval levels than a person
who might not be so interested in the subject matter. This is a difficult matter to address
within the confines of survey research. One possibility would be to ask respondents if
they were required to take any of the civics courses and how much interest they had in
the subject before they took the class. This approach would be heavily reliant on
something inherently unreliable, the memories of respondents. Another method would be
to find students about to take a civics class and ask them about their interest in the course,
whether or not they were required to take it, and their approval levels of the two
institutions. After the course had been completed, these same students could be asked to
complete the questionnaire again. This would allow measurement of the impact of civics
classes while also being able to account for the natural selection bias present in the
people taking these classes. This same type of study could be done if graduate students
were going to be studied. It is more likely that the students in the graduate classes would
have a strong interest in civics topics, but surveying their opinions prior to the beginning
of one or more classes would help to isolate the effects of the class itself.

Another caveat is that it was difficult to tell how respondents perceived the
questions and, as a result, what kinds of thoughts were salient when the questions were
answered. For example, respondents were asked how much they approved of each of the
institutions, and even though the questions did not ask about the specific people who
make up the institutions, it is possible that this is what respondents thought of when
answering the questions. It is difficult to circumvent such problems without the use of
prior research on the survey questions themselves, such as a pre-test of the survey. Because this research was pursued with the resources of a graduate student, the costs of such an undertaking were prohibitive. Future research that is also limited in resources could ask respondents after the questions what concepts they were thinking of when they answered the questions. Even though the questions would have already been asked, it would at least allow the researcher to know how “accurate” the responses were for those questions.

There are still a great number of factors that influence the difference in approval levels that have not been investigated by this research. The full regression model only yielded an r-squared of .073. As discussed in earlier chapters, factors such as the economy and current events have an important influence on every political institution to varying degrees. Further investigation into civics classes could focus on areas such as how civic education influences voting behavior both in terms of turnout and vote choice. If civic education can have an impact on approval levels, they are likely to impact behavior as well which, at certain times of the year at least, has a bigger impact on American politics.

It would also be interesting to explore in more detail the content of civics courses at a variety of levels. Caliendo (2000) focused on high school textbooks as well as what was discussed during class time, but this type of analysis has not been done for the college or the elementary levels. An in-depth analysis of textbooks for civics courses below the high school level with accompanying classroom observation could shed a lot of light on how students are initially taught to view the political institutions. Because of strict standards put in place by both the national and state governments, it is likely that
only minimal differentiation between classes exists, making such an analysis a very possible undertaking. On the other hand, there is much more likely to be a great deal of difference in college civics courses, even among the introductory classes. Not only is there likely to be a wider variety of textbooks (since individual instructors decide for themselves as opposed to a school council at the lower levels) but there are fewer classroom requirements as well. However, such a research endeavor at this level is still feasible. By obtaining a variety of syllabi from instructors it would be possible to ascertain how much time is being allotted to each institution in addition to the textbook assigned for the class. Because there is likely to be such a wide variety in college courses, a wide sampling of syllabi would be necessary. Future research into this area of higher education would be particularly interesting because it is subject to much fewer standards than at lower educational levels, and because there would be a relatively large variety in the types of courses offered.

In conclusion, this research has added to the understanding of public opinion by finding that there is a link between civics classes, an aspect of education that has not been looked at in quantitative research before, and approval for government institutions. It has also found that media cover the Supreme Court and Congress in different ways and these differences also contribute to a gap in approval levels of the two institutions. By using multiple methods to research these relationships, this research has been able to evaluate how the institutions are treated through content analysis. It also explored what people think of both branches through the survey analysis, and how changes in what people know can affect their opinions in the experiment. The use of a single method would not have been able to yield such a rich picture of how opinions of the Supreme Court and
Congress are formed and how they can shift. The next step in this line of research is to expand these findings by looking in related areas (such as seeing if presidential approval follows similar patterns) or by using enhanced resources to test some of the hypotheses that proved to be inconclusive based on the data in this research.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

These questions were asked of respondents to the survey portion of this research. Each person answering the survey was reached through a random-digit-dialing process and was an adult resident of Ohio. The questions were interspersed throughout the survey but have been renumbered here for the purposes of continuity.

Our first questions ask your opinions about the job performance of some political figures. If there is ever a question that you do not know the answer to or do not have an opinion on, feel free to tell me.

q1
First, do you approve or disapprove of the way President George W. Bush is doing his job?
   <1> Approve  [go to q2]
   <2> Disapprove [go to q3]
   <8> Refused   [go to q4]
   <9> Don’t know [go to q4]

q2
Would you say you strongly approve, somewhat approve, or slightly approve of the job President George W. Bush is doing?
   <1> Strongly approve [go to q4]
   <2> Somewhat approve [go to q4]
   <3> Slightly approve  [go to q4]
   <8> Refused   [go to q4]
   <9> Don’t know   [go to q4]

q3
Would you say you strongly disapprove, somewhat disapprove, or slightly disapprove of the job President George W. Bush is doing?
   <1> Strongly disapprove [go to q4]
   <2> Somewhat disapprove [go to q4]
   <3> Slightly disapprove [go to q4]
q4
Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S Congress is doing its job?
<1> Approve [go to q5]
<2> Disapprove [go to q6]
<8> Refused [go to q7]
<9> Don’t know [go to q7]

q5
Would you say you strongly approve, somewhat approve, or slightly approve of the job the U.S. Congress is doing?
<1> Strongly approve [go to q7]
<2> Somewhat approve [go to q7]
<3> Slightly approve [go to q7]
<8> Refused [go to q7]
<9> Don’t know [go to q7]

q6
Would you say you strongly disapprove, somewhat disapprove, or slightly disapprove of the job the U.S. Congress is doing?
<1> Strongly disapprove [go to q7]
<2> Somewhat disapprove [go to q7]
<3> Slightly disapprove [go to q7]
<8> Refused [go to q7]
<9> Don’t know [go to q7]

q7
Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S Supreme Court is doing its job?
<1> Approve [go to q8]
<2> Disapprove [go to q9]
<8> Refused [go to q10]
<9> Don’t know [go to q10]

q8
Would you say you strongly approve, somewhat approve, or slightly approve of the job the U.S. Supreme Court is doing?
<1> Strongly approve [go to q10]
<2> Somewhat approve [go to q10]
<3> Slightly approve [go to q10]
q9
Would you say you strongly disapprove, somewhat disapprove, or slightly disapprove of the job the U.S. Supreme Court is doing?

<1> Strongly disapprove [go to q10]
<2> Somewhat disapprove [go to q10]
<3> Slightly disapprove [go to q10]

<8> Refused [go to q10]
<9> Don’t know [go to q10]

q10
Now I’m going to ask you a few questions about your experience taking civics classes. By civics classes I mean any class you have ever taken that talked about American government or citizenship.

How many civics classes have you taken, at any point, during your education?

<1> 1
<2> 2
<3> 3-4
<4> 5-6
<5> 7-8
<6> more than 8
<7> none

<8> Refused
<9> Don’t know
q12
How about during high school? (Prompt if necessary: How many civic classes did you take during high school?)
   <1>  1
   <2>  2
   <3>  3
   <4>  4
   <5>  more than 4
   <6> none
   <8> Refused
   <9> Don’t know

q13
How about during undergraduate training at college?
   <1>  1
   <2>  2
   <3>  3
   <4>  4
   <5>  more than 4
   <6>  none
   <8> Refused
   <9>  Don’t know

q14
And finally, how about during graduate training at college?
   <1>  1
   <2>  2
   <3>  3
   <4>  4
   <5>  more than 4
   <6>  none
   <8> Refused
   <9>  Don’t know

q15
About how much time per day would you say that you spend watching television news programs?

q16
How many times per week do you read a daily newspaper?

q17
About how much time, on average, would you say you spend reading daily newspapers per week?
APPENDIX B

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

The first set of articles represents the altered ones presented to participants of the experiment. The second set of four are the original articles from which the experimental articles were adapted.

Experimental Articles

Media and Politics Study-May/June 2003

The following news articles have been taken from various newspapers from around the country. Please make sure to read both (all) of them (in order) and then complete the questionnaire you were given.

Divided Supreme Court rejects death row appeal

By Joan Biskupic

WASHINGTON -- A divided Supreme Court rejected the appeal of a condemned murderer in Virginia whose lawyer may have had a conflict of interest.

The court's 5-4 ruling broke along ideological lines. The five conservative justices, in an opinion by Antonin Scalia, said a defendant who claims his right to counsel has been violated must show that a conflict of interest hurt the lawyer's representation. They said that rule stands even when, as in this case, the trial judge apparently knew about the conflict and did nothing.

The four more liberal justices disagreed. They said that allowing such a conflict of interest by a lawyer undermines public confidence in the justice system, and that a new trial should have been ordered. "A rule that allows the state to force a murder victim's lawyer onto his accused . . . poisons the integrity of our adversary system of justice," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in his dissent.
The case of Walter Mickens, who was within one day of being executed last April when the Supreme Court agreed to hear his appeal, arises at a time of intense public debate over whether the process leading up to the death penalty has sufficient safeguards.

Some legal analysts say the court's rulings are very similar to the divisions found in Congress. “Conservative Republican justices are typically at odds with the more liberal Democrat justices” said David Tairys, a law professor at Temple University in Philadelphia. "It continues to put up legal barriers to correcting injustices."

Mickens was convicted and sentenced to death in 1993 for the forcible sodomy and fatal stabbing of Timothy Hall, 17, a year earlier. As Mickens appealed his case, a new court-appointed attorney found that Mickens' trial lawyer, Bryan Saunders, had represented Hall in an earlier juvenile court dispute.

The judge who dismissed charges against Hall after Hall's death had appointed Saunders to represent Mickens. (Saunders later testified that he did not think there was a conflict of interest.)

The high court ruled that even when a judge does not check on a possible conflict, a defendant appealing the case must show that the conflict adversely affected the representation.

Scalia was joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas.

Dissenting justices said that the victim's character might have mattered in the jury's choice of life or death for Mickens, and that a lawyer who once represented the victim would be unlikely to paint a negative picture.

**Prognosis bleak as health care decision stalled on key measures in Congress**

By Susan Milligan

WASHINGTON - Major health care legislation ranging from a patients' rights bill to prescription drug coverage for the elderly is stymied on Capitol Hill, the victims of politics and deep ideological differences within Congress.

A pledge to provide health care coverage to the tens of millions of uninsured Americans helped catapult Bill Clinton to the White House 10 years ago, and remained an issue in other campaigns. Last year, there was strong momentum on Capitol Hill to approve a patients' bill of rights that would allow patients to sue their health care providers for coverage.

But while individual members of Congress continue to address the importance of making changes in the health care system, it appears unlikely that they will agree on the details this year.
A Patient Protection Act giving patients the right to sue was approved by the House and Senate last year, but the two sides are still bickering about the differences between the two bills, including caps on court-awarded damages to patients. "The issue is stuck. That is unfortunate. It looks like things are at a very unproductive point in Congress," said Jeff Rosen, general counsel for the National Council on Disability, an independent federal agency.

Two House committees began work on GOP bills yesterday to help seniors buy prescription drugs through a government-subsidized program. But the measure, costing $350 billion over 10 years, is likely to run afoul in the Senate, where Democrats favor a more generous, $500 billion program that would expand Medicare to cover prescription drugs.

"We are moving backwards on health care," said Senator Bob Graham, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, in a speech at the National Press Club.

"When it comes to the promise of health care, we are a nation divided. The fortunate few can afford the latest in medical technology and the most effective new medications, but so many others are left without the best hopes offered by today's health care. That is wrong, and the American people know it's wrong."

Graham, a Florida Democrat, proposed a bill yesterday to require employers with 100 or more workers to provide health care coverage. But that idea, while backed by 92 interest groups representing health, labor and other concerns, is also expected to run into trouble with congressional Republicans loath to impose costly mandates on business.

"I think he should join it with his proposal to repeal the tax cut and make it the Democratic platform," said Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, the ranking Republican on Kennedy's committee.

"That's just going to add to the pressure, particularly for small employers," said Don Young, president of the Health Insurance Association of America.

The biggest barrier to passing some kind of bill, congressmen and advocates say, are the sharp ideological differences between the two parties. Both sides say they want to provide help for prescription drug users, but differ on whether it should be done through Medicare or a private program subsidized by the government. On patients' rights legislation, many GOP lawmakers fear a right to sue would be a gift to trial lawyers.

"It's really become a philosophical debate on the future of health care. Both sides have a lot at stake," said Nina Owcharenko, a health care policy analyst at the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation.

Graham's proposal to require certain employers to provide coverage is not supported by the American Association of Health Plans, but it's a start, some say.
"People may disagree with the details he's laid out, but at least he's laid out the issue," said Ron Hollander, president of the Florida Hospital Association. "He wants to start the debate he knows we need to have."

**Tennessee senator denies conflict of interest**

By William M. Welch

WASHINGTON -- Republican Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee is a man accustomed to excelling, even overachieving, in all he does.

Frist has always distinguished himself from colleagues by keeping "M.D." at the end of his senator's signature. He is the first doctor in the Senate in 50 years. Lately however there have been accusations leveled against him.

Some critics accuse him of a conflict of interest on health issues. Frist's father and brother founded what has become the nation's largest for-profit hospital chain, HCA. The company has created vast wealth for the Frist family. It also has been subject to the largest-ever federal fraud case; it agreed to repay the government $1.7 billion for overbilling Medicare.

The company, which has 180 hospitals and $18 billion in annual revenue, is the Microsoft of the health care industry, health policy consultant Robert Laszewski says. "They are an aggressive, acquisition-minded company. They try to come in and dominate markets. They are really tough," he says.

Jamie Court, executive director of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, a California-based consumer group, says Frist has helped the company by pushing for limits on damages in lawsuits. "He is going to be the poster boy for how close politicians have become with corporate criminals," Court said Friday.

Frist rejects any conflict of interest. He notes that he never managed or even worked for the company. Most of his assets are in a blind trust. His Senate financial disclosure forms, which report broad ranges of assets, show that Frist and his wife and children have $25 million or more in HCA stock.

Frist also figured in one of the final controversies of last year's congressional session. He was the author of a provision that blocks lawsuits by families claiming their children's autism was caused by vaccines containing mercury. The provision was added secretly to a bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, but Frist denied any involvement.
How Scalia Faced Ethics Issue; Though a Past Consultant, He Sat on AT&T Case
By Benjamin Weiser and Al Kamen

Judges often are required to decide whether they can ethically participate in a case before them because of previous relationships they may have had with those involved in the dispute.

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia confronted such an issue last fall. A law firm in the case before him had paid him a consulting fee of $25,800, before he was a justice on the Supreme Court, for services on behalf of AT&T in connection with an unrelated case. AT&T was also a litigant in the case that came before him last fall.

Scalia, after informally seeking advice from Chief Justice William Rehnquist about his former relationship with AT&T, remained on the case.

Experts in judicial ethics, in interviews last week, were divided about whether Scalia did the correct thing, whether his remaining on the case created an appearance of conflict of interest in violation of the canons of ethics.

"I think it does raise questions about his judicial judgment," said Monroe H. Freedman, former dean of the Hofstra Law School and a longtime legal activist and commentator on legal ethics. Freedman called Scalia's participation an "act of serious misjudgment."

According to Scalia's financial disclosure statement, he received the fee that year from the Chicago law firm of Sidley & Austin for consultation regarding a massive antitrust dispute between AT&T and MCI Communications Corp. He had been retained while a law professor at the University of Chicago because of his expertise in telecommunications law.

AT&T lawyers said Friday that Scalia worked with them in preparing their case and testified for them in the lawsuit brought against AT&T by MCI.

Last October, AT&T and MCI again confronted each other in an unrelated and much less important matter involving different issues: a procedural motion involving interpretation of a Federal Communications Commission rule. The dispute is part of a more significant controversy over fees for hookups by other companies into AT&T's networks.

According to federal law, a judge "shall disqualify himself in any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned." But different judges interpret the rules differently.

Some disqualify themselves in any case in which their old law firm is appearing before them -- even after many years -- or when one of their old clients is a litigant. Others remain sitting in such cases, depending on the circumstances.
The concern of the law and the code of conduct is not solely that a judge might appear to favor a party with whom he has been associated, but that he might disfavor such a party, bending over backward because of the past relationship.

Jeffrey M. Shaman, a law professor who heads the Center for Judicial Conduct Organizations, which is part of the American Judicature Society, said Scalia did not violate the legal canons but "if Judge Scalia wanted to appear impartial, he might have recused himself."

Freedman said he had no doubts that Scalia did the wrong thing.

During his initial Senate confirmation hearing to the Supreme Court in 1986, Scalia was asked to identify the criteria that would prompt him to recuse himself from a case.

Scalia said he would consult the canons of judicial ethics. He also said, "As far as my own personal soul search is concerned I would disqualify myself in any case in which I believed my connection with one of the litigants or any other circumstances would cause my judgment to be distorted in favor of or against one of the parties."

Original Articles

Headline: Divided Supreme Court rejects death row appeal
By Joan Biskupic

WASHINGTON -- A divided Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected the appeal of a condemned murderer in Virginia who learned after trial that his attorney once had represented the murder victim.

The court's 5-4 ruling broke along ideological lines. The five most conservative justices, in an opinion by Antonin Scalia, said a defendant who claims his right to counsel has been violated must show that a conflict of interest hurt the lawyer's representation. They said that rule stands even when, as in this case, the trial judge apparently knew about the conflict and did nothing.

The four more liberal justices disagreed. They said that allowing such a conflict of interest by a lawyer undermines public confidence in the justice system, and that a new trial should have been ordered. "A rule that allows the state to foist a murder victim's lawyer onto his accused . . . poisons the integrity of our adversary system of justice," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in his dissent.

The case of Walter Mickens, who was within one day of being executed last April when the Supreme Court agreed to hear his appeal, arises at a time of intense public debate over whether the process leading up to the death penalty has sufficient safeguards.
Congress and several state legislatures are focusing particularly on how to ensure that defendants without means get competent lawyers.

Some legal analysts say the court's rulings are at odds with that effort. "This majority has consistently moved in ways to expedite executions," said David Kairys, a law professor at Temple University in Philadelphia. "It continues to put up legal barriers to correcting injustices."

The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, based in Sacramento, praised the court for requiring a high standard for claims of ineffective counsel. Virginia Attorney General Jerry Kilgore said he thought the ruling "promotes justice."

Mickens was convicted and sentenced to death in 1993 for the forcible sodomy and fatal stabbing of Timothy Hall, 17, a year earlier. As Mickens appealed his case, a new court-appointed attorney found that Mickens' trial lawyer, Bryan Saunders, had represented Hall in an earlier juvenile court dispute.

The judge who dismissed charges against Hall after Hall's death had appointed Saunders to represent Mickens. (Saunders later testified that he did not think there was a conflict of interest.)

The high court ruled that even when a judge does not check on a possible conflict, a defendant appealing the case must show that the conflict adversely affected the representation.

Scalia was joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas.

Dissenting justices said that the victim's character might have mattered in the jury's choice of life or death for Mickens, and that a lawyer who once represented the victim would be unlikely to paint a negative picture.

Headline: Prognosis bleak on health care decision stalled on key measures in the Congress
By Susan Milligan, Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - Major health care legislation ranging from a patients' rights bill to prescription drug coverage for the elderly is stymied on Capitol Hill, the victims of politics and deep ideological differences within a Congress distracted by homeland security issues and re-elections, lobbyists and lawmakers say.

A pledge to provide health care coverage to the tens of millions of uninsured Americans helped catapult Bill Clinton to the White House 10 years ago, and remained an issue in other campaigns. Last year, there was strong momentum on Capitol Hill to approve a
patients' bill of rights that would allow patients to sue their health care providers for coverage.

But while individual members of Congress continue to address the importance of making changes in the health care system, it appears unlikely that they will agree on the details this year.

A Patient Protection Act giving patients the right to sue was approved by the House and Senate last year, but the two sides are still bickering about the differences between the two bills, including caps on court-awarded damages to patients. "The issue is stuck. That is unfortunate. It looks like things are at a very unproductive point in Congress," said Jeff Rosen, general counsel for the National Council on Disability, an independent federal agency.

Two House committees began work on GOP bills yesterday to help seniors buy prescription drugs through a government-subsidized program. But the measure, costing $350 billion over 10 years, is likely to run afoul in the Senate, where majority Democrats favor a more generous, $500 billion program that would expand Medicare to cover prescription drugs.

A mental health parity bill to require insurers to give equal benefits for mental health care as they do for physical ailments has broad bipartisan support. But the measure has been held up because of concerns about the cost of the benefits and the scope of mental health maladies that would be included.

"We are moving backwards on health care," said Senator Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, in a speech yesterday at the National Press Club.

"When it comes to the promise of health care, we are a nation divided. The fortunate few can afford the latest in medical technology and the most effective new medications, but so many others are left without the best hopes offered by today's health care. That is wrong, and the American people know it's wrong."

Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, proposed a bill yesterday to require employers with 100 or more workers to provide health care coverage. But that idea, while backed by 92 interest groups representing health, labor and other concerns, is also expected to run into trouble with congressional Republicans loath to impose costly mandates on business.

"I think he should join it with his proposal to repeal the tax cut and make it the Democratic platform," said Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, the ranking Republican on Kennedy's committee.

"That's just going to add to the pressure, particularly for small employers," said Don Young, president of the Health Insurance Association of America.
Sponsors of individual bills say they may make some progress before year's end. "We're continuing our discussions with the White House. They haven't shut down yet," said Senator John Edwards, Democrat of North Carolina and a chief sponsor of the Senate patients' rights bill.

Senator Pete Domenici, Republican of New Mexico, said he was hopeful that the Bush administration and House Republicans could work out a deal on language for the mental parity bill.

But their colleagues, joined by lobbyists on both sides, say the chances are slim. Congress wants to complete work on the proposed new Department of Homeland Defense before the Sept. 11 anniversary, and still has 13 appropriations bills to finish. Lawmakers are also anxious to get home to campaign for re-election in a year when both chambers of Congress are very closely divided and whose party leadership could change with a few incumbent losses.

"Sept. 11 had something to do with changing our priorities around here. We've had to focus on war issues, homeland security," said Representative Jim Greenwood, Republican of Pennsylvania.

The biggest barrier, congressmen and advocates say, is the sharp ideological differences between the two parties. Both sides say they want to provide help for prescription drug users, but differ on whether it should be done through Medicare or a private program subsidized by the government. On patients' rights legislation, many GOP lawmakers fear a right to sue would be a gift to trial lawyers.

"It's really become a philosophical debate on the future of health care. Both sides have a lot at stake," said Nina Owcharenko, a health care policy analyst at the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation.

Both sides also face an electorate demanding action. A voter survey released earlier this month by NPR/the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government found health care at the top of voters’ concerns, behind the economy and the war. The prescription drug issue ranks number one or two in internal Democratic polls, and is addressed consistently during town hall meetings in congressional districts.

Kennedy's proposal to require certain employers to provide coverage is not supported by the American Association of Health Plans, but it's a start, some say.

"People may disagree with the details he's laid out, but at least he's laid out the issue," said Ron Hollander, president of the Massachusetts Hospital Association. "He wants to start the debate he knows we need to have."
WASHINGTON -- Republican Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee is a man accustomed to excelling, even overachieving, in all he does.

Born to wealth and privilege and educated at the nation's finest schools, Frist built a career opening chests and saving lives with pioneering heart and lung transplant surgery. Then he simply walked away in 1994 for an audacious political campaign against a popular incumbent senator.

Not only did he win, but eight years later, the surgeon-senator who didn't vote until Ronald Reagan was leaving the White House is also passing more experienced colleagues to become majority leader. Senate GOP colleagues are expected to make his selection official today. He'll be the point man for President Bush at what could be his presidency's peak of power, with his party commanding majorities in the House and Senate and high public-approval ratings.

Few who know Frist question whether he is up to the job. But unanswered is whether his unique combination of surgical and political skills will help him forge compromises that advance Bush's agenda without alienating his party's fractious elements.

"He has addressed problems of medical care for all Americans, not just theoretically, in a hands-on way," Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., said Sunday. "He personifies not just the rhetoric about idealism but as a life that has been lived."

Democrats have been impressed, too. They have regarded Frist as a tough opponent on two key health-policy measures: giving patients greater ability to sue their HMOs and providing a prescription-drug benefit to seniors. This year, they learned what he could do politically. Frist led the Republicans' Senate campaigns, which took them from a minority to a majority.

"Maybe his ascendancy will help represent a breakthrough on things like providing through Medicare a prescription-drug benefit," said Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla. "I certainly hope so."

Going for the jugular

Frist didn't enter politics until 1994. He didn't even vote until he was 36.

Now 50, he is a Southerner with a conservative record. But he presents a more urbane and sophisticated image than Sen. Trent Lott, the man he is replacing, to the educated suburbanites who are increasingly the Republican Party's target voters.

"The main thing that Frist represents that Lott does not represent, and what the Bush White House wants the most, is that Frist is a national person and a national political
figure, as opposed to being a Southern political figure," says David Bositis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Frist, a marathoner, can be tough. When he became head of the Republicans' 2002 Senate campaigns, he joked about his qualifications: All his training, Frist said, was pointed toward one thing: "Within 45 seconds, to be able to cut out the human heart." Democrats who lost Senate seats may think he did just that.

Republicans expect Frist and Bush will push health issues to the front of the Senate's agenda. Tops among the health care issues next year will be helping seniors pay prescription-drug bills, health coverage for the uninsured, and finding agreement on innovations that will shore up Medicare without busting the federal budget.

Frist has proven flexible. He pushed for $500 million in international AIDS spending last year, then acquiesced to Bush's $200 million offer. He also drew criticism from some for compromising on the issue of stem-cell research. He opposed "therapeutic cloning" of human embryos for research in treating diabetes, Parkinson's and other diseases, angering advocates of more research and treatment.

Already, he has faced hostility from some hard-liners. "Sen. Bill Frist is not somebody conservatives would be comfortable with," says Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation and a longtime leader of the GOP's conservative wing. "He's a moderate Republican at heart."

Frist has voted with conservatives to ban certain forms of abortion. But some anti-abortion groups doubt his commitment to their cause of banning abortion.

Frist figured in one of the final controversies of this year's congressional session. He was the author of a provision that blocks lawsuits by families claiming their children's autism was caused by vaccines containing mercury. The provision was added secretly to a bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, but Frist denied any involvement.

Denies conflict of interest

Frist has always distinguished himself from colleagues by keeping "M.D." at the end of his senator's signature. He is the first doctor in the Senate in 50 years.

Some critics accuse him of a conflict of interest on health issues. Frist's father and brother founded what has become the nation's largest for-profit hospital chain, HCA. The company has created vast wealth for the Frist family. It also has been subject to the largest-ever federal fraud case; it agreed to repay the government $1.7 billion for overbilling Medicare.

The company, which has 180 hospitals and $18 billion in annual revenue, is the Microsoft of the health care industry, health policy consultant Robert Laszewski says.
"They are an aggressive, acquisition-minded company. They try to come in and dominate markets. They are really tough," he says.

Jamie Court, executive director of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, a California-based consumer group, says Frist has helped the company by pushing for limits on damages in lawsuits. "He is going to be the poster boy for how close the Republican Party is with corporate criminals," Court said Friday.

Frist rejects any conflict of interest. He notes that he never managed or even worked for the company. Most of his assets are in a blind trust. His Senate financial disclosure forms, which report broad ranges of assets, show that Frist and his wife and children have $25 million or more in HCA stock.

With Lott's departure in a furor over race, Frist may face that issue as well. Frist was not in Congress to vote on many civil rights bills that Lott opposed, but he received a failing grade, as did all Republican senators, from the NAACP this year. And during this year's Senate campaigns, which he led, Republicans were accused of discouraging black turnout in several states.

Headline: How Scalia Faced Ethics Issue; Though a Past Consultant, He Sat on AT&T Case
By Benjamin Weiser and Al Kamen, Washington Post Staff Writers

Judges often are required to decide whether they can ethically participate in a case before them because of previous relationships they may have had with those involved in the dispute.

Antonin Scalia, President Reagan's choice for the Supreme Court, confronted such an issue last fall on the U.S. Court of Appeals here. A law firm in the case before him had paid him a consulting fee of $25,800 three years earlier, before he was a judge, for services on behalf of AT&T in connection with an unrelated case. AT&T was also a litigant in the case that came before him last fall.

Scalia, after informally seeking advice from the chief judge about his former relationship with AT&T, remained on the case. He wrote an opinion ruling against the company.

Experts in judicial ethics, in interviews last week, were divided about whether Scalia did the correct thing, whether his remaining on the case created an appearance of conflict of interest in violation of the canons of ethics.

"I think it does raise questions about his judicial judgment," said Monroe H. Freedman, former dean of the Hofstra Law School and a longtime legal activist and commentator on legal ethics. Freedman called Scalia's participation an "act of serious misjudgment."
By contrast, John P. Frank, a leading commentator on the subject of judicial disqualification, saw "absolutely . . . no impropriety" in Scalia's action.

According to Scalia's 1982 financial disclosure statement, he received the fee that year from the Chicago law firm of Sidley & Austin for consultation regarding a massive antitrust dispute between AT&T and MCI Communications Corp. He had been retained in 1980, while a law professor at the University of Chicago, because of his expertise in telecommunications law.

AT&T lawyers said Friday that Scalia worked with them in preparing their case and was to testify for them in the lawsuit brought against AT&T by MCI. He was not called to testify, they said, because his testimony was unnecessary.

Last October, AT&T and MCI again confronted each other in an unrelated and much less important matter involving different issues: a procedural motion involving interpretation of a Federal Communications Commission rule. The dispute is part of a more significant controversy over fees for hookups by other companies into AT&T's networks.

According to federal law, a judge "shall disqualify himself in any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned." But different judges interpret the rules differently.

Some disqualify themselves in any case in which their old law firm is appearing before them -- even after many years -- or when one of their old clients is a litigant. Others remains sitting in such cases, depending on the circumstances.

The concern of the law and the code of conduct is not solely that a judge might appear to favor a party with whom he has been associated, but that he might disfavor such a party, bending over backward because of the past relationship.

Last fall, neither AT&T nor MCI knew that Scalia was sitting on the case because it has a motion and the judges hearing it were not identified in advance, according to attorneys on both sides. No oral arguments were held. Scalia did not inform either side of the consulting arrangement, attorneys said. In his Oct. 4 opinion, Scalia, joined by Judges Robert H. Bork and Abner J. Mikva, ruled against his former associates, taking MCI's position over AT&T.

Scalia responded to questions from The Post through a law clerk, who said Scalia's participation in the 1985 case (Western Union Telegraph Co. v. FCC) was proper because sufficient time had passed since his involvement with AT&T and Sidley & Austin, which still represents AT&T.

Speaking for Scalia, the law clerk said, "It's a common practice for judges to recuse themselves from matters [involving] a company that they have worked for . . . for two to three years after their connection with that company. The judge recused himself from all matters which concerned AT&T for a period of three years."
The clerk, who asked not to be identified, said Scalia also checked with Chief Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III "to make sure that three years was an adequate time period." (Robinson declined to be interviewed.) The clerk said AT&T had not been a regular client of Scalia's. In addition to the $25,800 listed on the 1982 disclosure form, the clerk said, Scalia received a fee from AT&T in 1980 of less than $2,000 for presenting a seminar.

Jeffrey M. Shaman, a law professor who heads the Center for Judicial Conduct Organizations, which is part of the American Judicature Society, said Scalia did not violate the legal canons but "if Judge Scalia wanted to appear absolutely, perfectly impartial, he might have recused himself."

Freedman said he had no doubts that Scalia did the wrong thing.

Geoffrey C. Hazard Jr., a Yale law professor and expert in legal ethics, said, "It's a judgment call and not a per se [automatic] disqualification." Hazard said a judge should ask, "Has this thing got anything to do with what I worked on before?" and if the answer is no, then he's going to keep on going."

During his Aug. 4, 1982, Senate confirmation hearing for the appeals bench, Scalia was asked to identify the criteria that would prompt him to recuse himself from a case.

Scalia said he would consult the canons of judicial ethics. He also said, "As far as my own personal soul search is concerned I would disqualify myself in any case in which I believed my connection with one of the litigants or any other circumstances would cause my judgment to be distorted in favor of or against one of the parties. I would furthermore disqualify myself if a situation arose in which, even though my judgment would not be distorted, a reasonable person would believe that my judgment would be distorted. That does not mean anybody in the world, but a reasonable person."

(Scalia joined in a 1985 appeals court decision reinstating a lower court jury's decision that The Washington Post libeled former Mobil Oil Corp. president William P. Tavoulareas in a 1979 article about his business dealings and awarding him $2,050,000 in damages. He later dissented from a full appeals court decision to rehear the issue. The matter is pending.)
This survey was presented to participants of the experiment after they had read their assigned experimental articles.

**Media and Politics Study-May/June 2003**

First, we are interested in knowing how much support people have for some of our government’s institutions. Please check the response that is most appropriate for you.

How much do you approve of the way the Supreme Court is handling its job? Do you…
- Strongly approve
- Somewhat approve
- Slightly approve
- Slightly disapprove
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

How much do you approve of the way Congress is handling its job? Do you…
- Strongly approve
- Somewhat approve
- Slightly approve
- Slightly disapprove
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove
How much do you approve of the way the President is handling his job? Do you…

- Strongly approve
- Somewhat approve
- Slightly approve
- Slightly disapprove
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

How ethical do you think elected politicians generally are? Do you think they are…

- Very ethical
- Somewhat ethical
- Slightly ethical
- Slightly unethical
- Somewhat unethical
- Very unethical

How ethical do you think Supreme Court justices generally are? Do you think they are…

- Very ethical
- Somewhat ethical
- Slightly ethical
- Slightly unethical
- Somewhat unethical
- Very unethical

How much do you think ideology factors into decisions of elected politicians?

- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

How much do you think ideology factors into decisions of Supreme Court justices?

- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all
Next, we would like to know how much people agree with the following statements.

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. Do you…
   Strongly agree
   Somewhat agree
   Neither agree nor disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Strongly disagree

I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people. Do you…
   Strongly agree
   Somewhat agree
   Neither agree nor disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Strongly disagree

Public officials don't care much what people like me think. Do you…
   Strongly agree
   Somewhat agree
   Neither agree nor disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Strongly disagree

Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. Do you…
   Strongly agree
   Somewhat agree
   Neither agree nor disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Strongly disagree

What do you think is the biggest problem facing this nation today?

Finally, we have a few background questions that will be used only for statistical purposes.

How many times per week do you read a daily newspaper (not including the Lantern)? ________

About how much time, on average, would you say you spend reading daily newspapers per week? ________
Which of the following best describes your party affiliation?
   Strong Democrat
   Weak Democrat
   Independent
   Weak Republican
   Strong Republican
   Other ______________________

What is your class status?
   Freshman
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior
   Graduating senior
   Graduate student

What is your gender?
   Male                             Female

What is your age? __________

What race or races do you consider yourself?
   __________________________________
   __________________________________
   __________________________________

What station number were you assigned to in this study?_______

Thank you for participating in this study.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Slotnick, Elliot E. and Jennifer A. Segal. 1998. *Television News and the Supreme Court: All the News That’s Fit to Air?* Cambridge University Press.


