

Mood and Agendas: Developing Policy-Specific Conceptions of Mood

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1 Mood and (Policy Specific) Moods

Public policy mood, in its original concept (in Stimson (1991)), was a set of global attitudes toward government. That was true both because theory dictated it and because at the origin of this research plan—in 1987—more specific measures would have stretched available data to the limit. Some 24 years later theory has not changed. But data availability has increased remarkably.

Our database of individual survey national survey results now numbers almost 8,000 individual administrations of some 400 different question series. Where once it was difficult to find enough data to estimate a single national mood, now we can do the same in numerous highly specific policy domains. That is our goal in the larger project of which this paper is part. We aim to produce policy-specific mood estimates in 50–100 subtopics and we will use the standardized policy coding scheme of the Agendas Project Baumgartner and Jones (1993); Jones and Baumgartner (2005) to organize those topics.¹

The main left-right dimension of public policy mood, we have long known, captures much—but not all—of the full scope of policy debate in American politics. The issue is usually treated as one of two dimensions which capture all but a few issues and then some stray residual issues which are different. That remains the case, as we will show below. But the luxury of having policy specific estimates is that we can treat those issues which do not fit well with the two dimensional account in detail, rather than treating them as just strange items which do not work.

Our starting point is the familiar, Mood itself. We display the standard estimates of Mood in Figure 1. It is in its essence cyclical, a thermostatic product of changed party control and alternating directions of public policy that result from party control. That, as we shall soon see, is not the only track public opinion might take. But it does characterize the broad movements of opinion change in the United States and elsewhere.

In consequence, all components of this mood must themselves be cyclical. Any policy preference series that is going to be correlated with Mood must not only be cyclical, but have the same cycles. That implies a common causal pattern for all, alternating preferences driven by alternating episodes of policy-making driven by alternating party control of government.

Partly, this is a statistical requirement. On average, the component parts of the Mood must correspond to its movements over time, since the Mood is an aggregation of the individual question items that make it up. But, as we will see in the next section, several important and politically relevant issues constitute exceptions to this general trend.

Opinion movement in the norm is cyclical. And those cycles coincide because they are responses to a common cause, government policy. But normal though it is, cyclical opinion movement is not the only possible dynamic. We shall learn something important by observing sets of issue preferences which do not cycle. The most striking cases involve belief in equality of various kinds. First, we discuss what goes on behind the scenes to

¹All these data will become available for public use through the Policy Agendas website <http://policyagendas.org> before the close of the project.

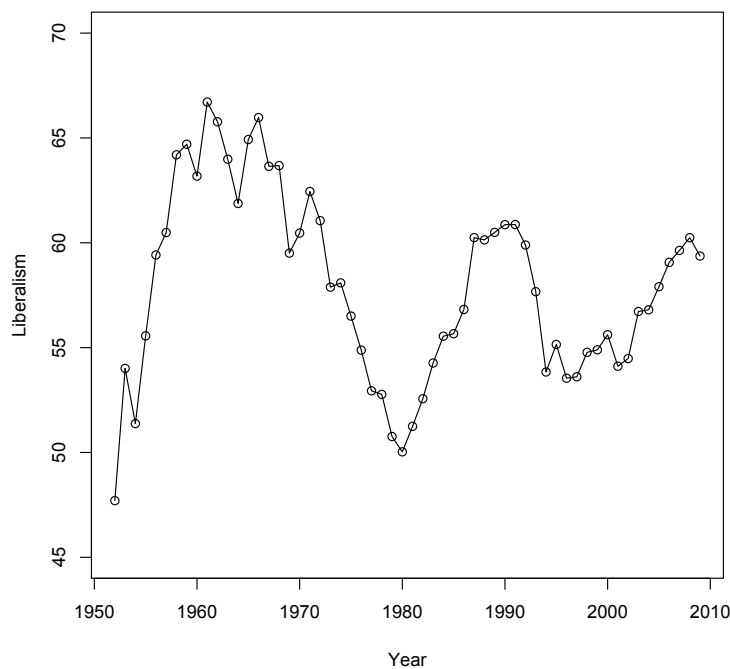


Figure 1: Public Policy Mood: 1952 to 2010

produce policy-specific moods.

2 Generating Policy-Specific Moods

For those familiar with the concept and estimation of the original global Mood Stimson (1991), the extension to policy-specific moods will be mostly straightforward. Global Mood is an annual and aggregate measure of the public’s preferences for more or less government—across multiple policy domains. Our task is to break down global Mood into its component parts (where the data allow) and generate policy specific moods. Before estimating, however, we had a time-consuming task to complete. We began by assigning policy codes to the approximately 400 (and growing) survey question series that make up the Mood database. Each question was given a code that matches a Policy Code from the Agendas Project coding scheme. Importantly, when questions covered multiple topics, we assigned multiple codes. This was the case for about 25 percent of our database.

Understanding the policy specific mood series we have generated requires some familiarity of the Policy Agendas Codebook as well. There are 19 major topic areas, ranging from Health (Major Topic 300) to Community Development and Housing Issues (Major Topic 1400), each of which is then broken down into subtopics, often on the order of 15 subtopics. Major topic 100 (Macroeconomics), for example, covers a broad range of issues (e.g., Inflation, Subtopic 101; Unemployment Rate, Subtopic 103) that have been the subject of public debate—and the topic of much survey research—in the United States for quite

some time. As such, the data series for both the Major Topic and many of the Subtopics are rich for Macroeconomics. In other words, we are able to estimate multiple policy specific mood series within Major Topic 100. On the other hand, some topics have not enjoyed as much public attention, and as such, the public opinion data are sparse. Major Topic 800 (Energy), for example, falls into this category. Our estimates for Energy Policy Mood will, as a result, be less reliable, if even possible.

Because of the disparity in data availability and the potential effect on the caliber of our estimates, we have also created simple quality scores for our policy moods: High and Low, based on our judgments from two indicators. For each series we estimate, we include information on the number of series and the number of administrations. Thus, we know how much data was used to generate each mood estimate. While the old adage of “more is better,” holds in some cases, it should not be applied as a general rule when it comes to policy specific moods. For example, an environmental studies scholar interested in public support for mass transportation need not be discouraged by the availability of only one survey question coded squarely in his or her Policy Code, 1001. The reason is two-fold. First, the available question reads “Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on mass transportation?”, a direct measure of the concept in which the scholar is interested. Secondly, the series has been asked across many years, making the estimate even more reliable.

The intuition behind the second reason is inherent in the estimation process. After assigning policy codes to each question series, we were able to move to phase two, estimation. To do so, we used Stimson’s (1991) dyad ratios algorithm, which accomplishes a task similar to principal components analysis. The algorithm assesses the variation over time within series by rendering them as ratios of the same stimulus question repeated over time. When more than one question series is used for a policy specific mood, it assesses covariation between series by observing the covariation of those ratios.

2.1 Scope of Government

In addition to the policy specific mood series, we created two dichotomous variables that tap into two dimensions of the scope of government: one related to spending and one general scope, whether the respondent wants government to “do more” or “do less” in that particular area. For scholars interested in only government spending, for example, we can now provide the public’s preference over time. We can also do so by issue area.

3 Policy-Specific Moods

3.1 Equality is Different

First for African Americans, then for women, and then for gays and lesbians, American beliefs have evolved from a traditional status quo to a new belief in equality. The status quo, in all cases, was a traditional society which held that discrimination was the natural

order of things. Not to be too timid about the matter, most Americans believed that blacks and women were biologically inferior, and gays morally inferior, all of which justified a society in which discrimination was both expected and normal and assertions of equality were considered radical and deviant.

In a sense it is much easier to understand why traditional beliefs persist than why they change. What we see in all these cases is that tradition is disrupted by the new assertion of equality. And then that new belief in equality—and opposition to discrimination—grows slowly and steadily over a long period of time. And then, not in months or years, but in decades, that belief in equality becomes a majority view and (and now extrapolating from actual data) probably is on its way to consensus and then uniformity.

What could explain such a process, and probably the only thing that could explain such a process, is generational change. The process we see is driven by socialization in the first instance. When young people come of age, the need to fit into society leads them to accept the beliefs of a society as they are at the moment they come of age. They are not fundamentally more open or tolerant than their elders, it is just that they experience a different context. Thus if there is growing belief in equality, it will seem natural to the young to accept it, just as it is natural for those who came of age in a previous context not to do so. That means that once such beliefs begin to evolve, they are swept along by the tidal force of demography. The young become the middle-aged and create a still more tolerant context for the next generation. And equally, the older generations who do not accept the changed views leave the electorate. All of these are steady linear processes.

3.1.1 Race

We can see over a half century of such a process in American views on race in Figure 2.² Starting in the 1940s when about four in ten Americans believed in equality as a goal and supported policies to end or reduce discrimination as a means, those beliefs gradually grow over sixty years to where majority and minority are reversed. What is impressive in the figure is not how far we have come (from about 41% to about 63% supporting equality), but how utterly steady the process is. The growth is like movement of a glacier, very slow but very very steady.

We can also see the thermostat at work in racial attitudes. In mood and all its correlates, for example, the year 1980 is a conservative high water mark. We see that too in racial attitudes. But here the movement is only *relative* to the steadily liberalizing trend. But because the trend is modest in speed, racial attitudes are highly correlated with other left-right attitudes, even though the one trends and the others do not.

²All policy-specific moods in this paper are preliminary estimates. As part of our ongoing NSF project we have promised to improve the existing mood database, a task we have barely started at this writing. Thus all final estimates will reflect the changed data input. The series in this paper might be used a placeholders, awaiting the final estimates, but should not be included in published work.



Figure 2: Ethnic Minority and Racial Group Discrimination

3.1.2 Gender and Sexual Orientation

Since straight lines all look alike, the graph for women and gay rights issues could almost be the same we have already seen for race. (See Figure 3.) The issues are newer, as are the survey measures. But the pattern is the same—for women’s rights and gay and lesbian rights or for both of them and race. For the issue of the role of women in American society we see a pro-equality majority in our first measures in the early 1970s (a half decade after the outset of the women’s movement). That position grows steadily and predictably to a point near 90% approval of equality measures by 2008. If the questions continue to be asked, it looks like the ultimate limit is unanimity.

The role of gays and lesbians has been accompanied by a good deal more controversy. Although support for gay and lesbian rights is a majority position when we first have measures of it in the late 1970s, it clearly was not in an earlier era. And too in this area it clearly depends a lot on which rights are in question. There is widespread support for equal treatment of gays and lesbians on the job. Extending the right to marry, in contrast, has been a flashpoint issue. But even here the trend is clear. Homosexual marriage, that is, becomes less controversial and more mainstream with each passing year.

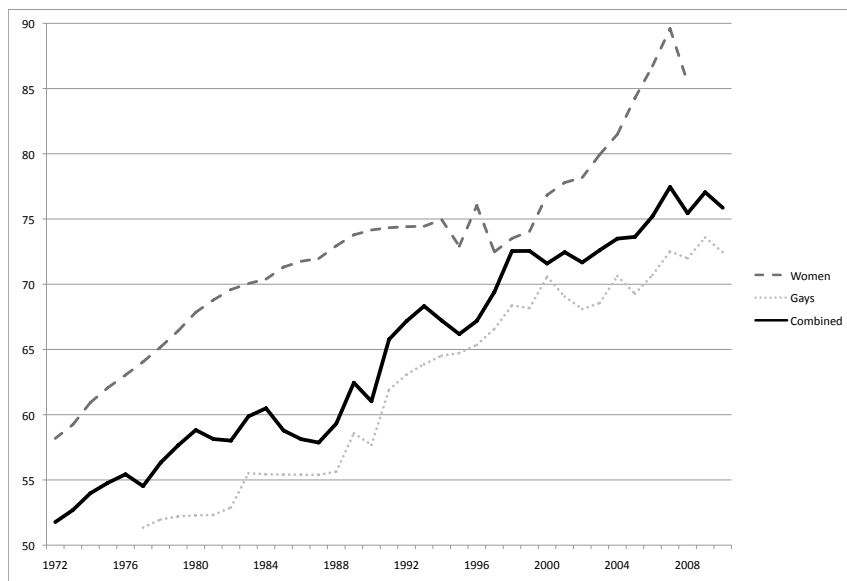


Figure 3: Gender and Sexual Orientation Discrimination

3.2 “New Deal” Issue Domains

Mood, the global concept, has always been understood to tap the main dimension of left-right politics in America. This is conventionally understood to be the issue bundle associated with the “New Deal” and it’s later extensions into areas such as education and environment.

Here we examine policy-specific estimates of opinion of four of the main aspects of the New Deal issue set, healthcare, education, environment, and welfare. If in fact the global mood estimate captures the policy content of these four areas then we should expect high correlations between between the global measure and the policy specific measures. These correlations are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Correlations of Policy-specific Estimates of New Deal Issues with Public Policy Mood (First Dimension)

Variable	Correlation
Health	.844
Education	.517
Environment	.664
Welfare	.689

The expectations are easily met, with correlations varying between .84 (healthcare) at the

high end and .52 (education) at the low end. Although these correlations leave a little room for systematic variation specific to the policy domain, most of what they measure is shared. We graph the four series, plus global Mood, in Figure 4. The parallelism the eye can easily see is of course the correlation of Table 1. What the correlational evidence does not convey is that the popularity of these programs varies widely. Environment and healthcare are nearly universally valued ends, generating overwhelming support for government action. Education follows pretty closely behind. And then welfare is unloved by the American public, as would be expected.



Figure 4: Policy-Specific New Deal Issue Tracks

4 Developing Indicators of Government Activity

Political scientists face a difficult problem in assessing the number and ideological tenor of the outputs of government. In this section we compare several available indicators of government activity from the policy agendas project and show the difficulties of developing a single indicator of how active the government is.

Table 2 shows a factor analytic approach to the creation of a single indicator based on ten individual series including congressional hearings, roll call votes, presidential and supreme court activities, as indicated. Table 3 shows the same data for the creation of a separate indicator of congressional activities alone.

In the columns of the tables we show the factor loadings and the overall number of observations in each series, first for an overall indicator of activity of the government and

next for each of three individual series which we have chosen for illustrative purposes. Several remarkable patterns emerge from this exercise.

Table 2: Government Activity Factor Loadings

Type of Activity	Overall		Civil Rights		Environment		Social Security	
	Factor Loading	N	Factor Loading	N	Factor Loading	N	Factor Loading	N
Hearings	.69	80647	.63	739	.74	3594	.17	796
Referrals	-.44	29357	.61	280	.72	1375	.	0
House Roll Calls	.95	20677	.52	295	.73	631	.26	148
Senate Roll Calls	.74	18256	.42	644	.83	390	.49	223
Public Laws	-.62	16678	.68	49	.53	543	.08	79
CQ Lines	.08	12935	.59	178	.70	682	.13	82
Executive Orders	-.32	3009	.12	46	.47	64	.03	6
SOTU	.01	13836	-.25	319	.11	293	.001	228
Supreme Court	-.04	8064	.65	488	.53	111	.09	26
Net Liberal Laws	.	.	.31	15	.43	15	.02	9
Eigenvalue	2.61		2.62		3.73		1.81	

Note: Entries are unrotated factor loadings on the first dimension. The N's shown are the total number of observations in the underlying dataset. The underlying data consists of annual counts of various governmental activities, both overall and by topic area. Each activity series begins on or about 1946 and ends between 2003 and 2007.

Table 3: Congressional Activity Factor Loadings

Type of Activity	Overall		Civil Rights		Environment		Social Security	
	Factor		Factor		Factor		Factor	
	Loading	N	Loading	N	Loading	N	Loading	N
Hearings	.66	80647	.40	739	.55	3594	.39	796
CQ Lines	.	12935	.53	178	.65	682	.47	82
House Roll Calls	.88	20777	.58	295	.80	631	.69	148
Senate Roll Calls	.79	18256	.38	644	.85	390	.74	223
Eigenvalue	1.83		.92		2.09		1.40	

Note: See the previous table for a description of the data.

First, looking at the overall levels of activity, it is clear that there is no single factor, or rather that certain series are quite independent of others. The Supreme Court follows a calendar that has little to do with the rest of government. Presidential executive orders similarly are unrelated, or slightly negatively related, to the other series. Discussing what “the government in Washington” is doing is made slightly more difficult because of the separation of powers: The different branches might well be doing different things, or in any case having different levels of activity over time.

Second, a general factor does emerge from the data even for overall levels of activity, though it is heavily focused on congressional activities. (We develop a separate index based solely on congressional activity; see Table 3.)

Third, looking at the individual series, it is clear that no single pattern need obtain when we look at individual policy domains. To be sure, on average it will have to occur that the general trends in each domain one might investigate will add up to the total, but any single series might have idiosyncratic trends. Some issues are mostly budgetary (e.g. social security), while others have little budgetary impact (e.g., abortion, gun control, civil rights). Other issues have been more prominent on the presidential agenda or were handled through executive orders while some are courts-based or legislative in focus. Finally, the issue-specific cases make clear that any given indicator for any given issue may be extremely sparse. For example, there are only 79 laws relating to social security over the entire post-war period, and we counted not a single bill referral hearing on that topic.

Fourth, it does appear that we can more easily create an index of congressional activity; Table 3 shows uniformly more consistent results when we focus only on this. This suggests that we may do a better job of assessing attention to those issues that have a congressional focus. It also is worth noting that our measure of global activity is heavily influenced by the congressional series, as we will see below.

To say the least, these illustrations suggest that user must be careful in the selection of appropriate indicators of government activity. Data sparseness is a particularly important problem. And in comparing issue to issue it is clear that a one-size-fits-all approach to the indicators of government activity might well not be appropriate.

Figure 5 shows the various series laid out in Table 1 along with the resulting factor, and Figure 6 shows the same for the congressional activities factor.

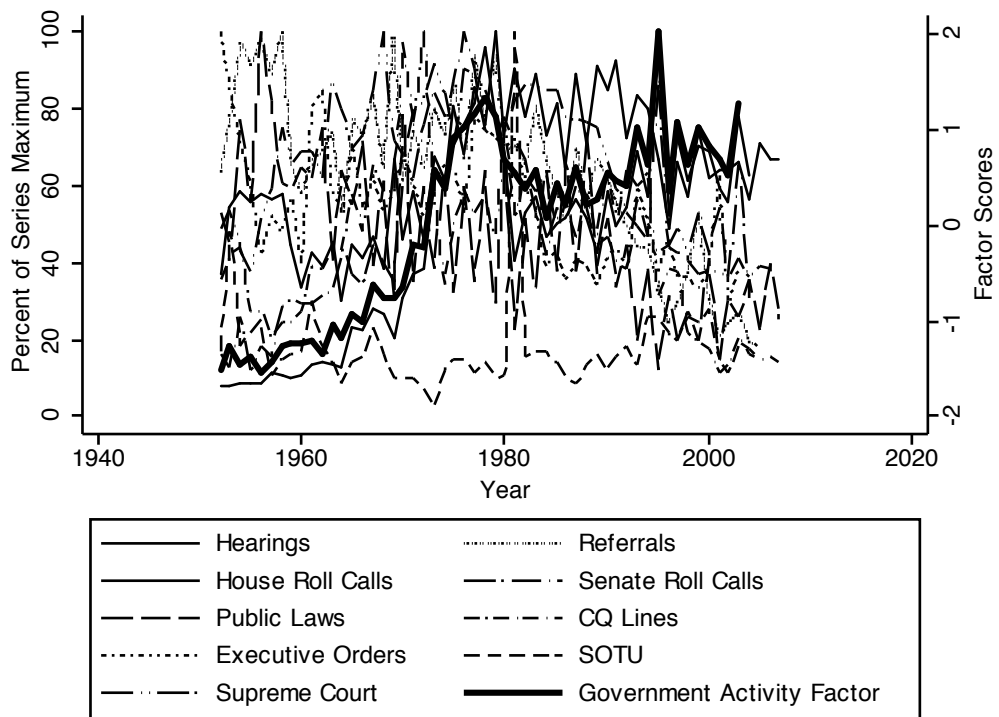


Figure 5: Government Activity Factor and Component Parts, All Topics

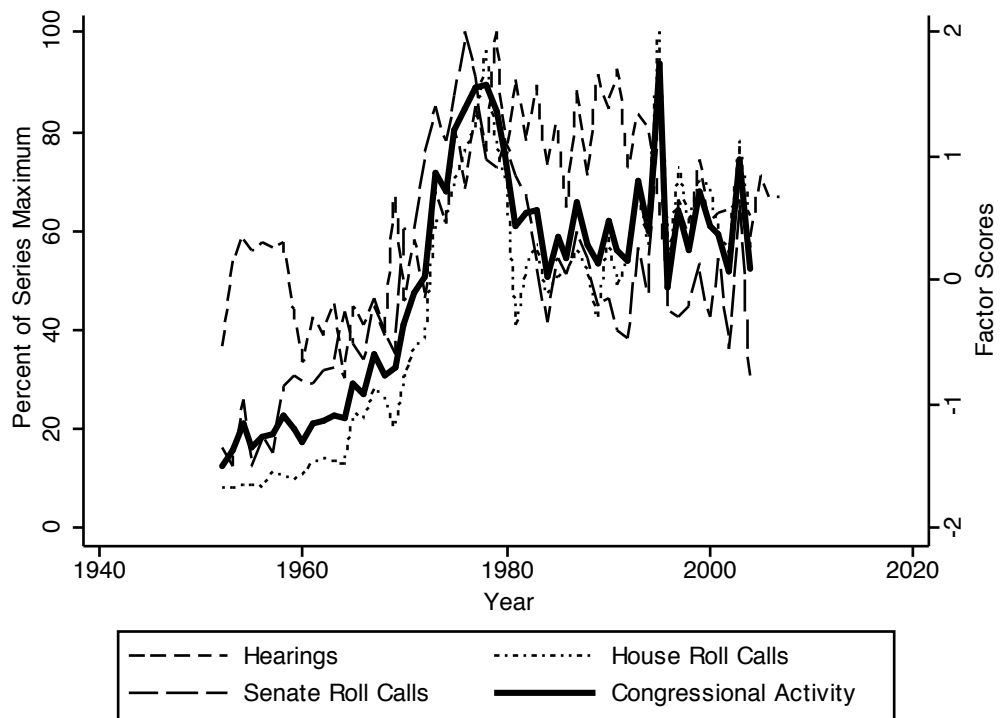


Figure 6: Congressional Activity Factor and Component Parts, All Topics

Figure 5 makes clear the noisy and messy nature of the government activity series. Each of the underlying series has a different variance and maximum value so we have expressed them here in terms of their percentage of the maximum value each obtains over the period of study. As is clear from the figure, a few of the series obtain this maximum right at the beginning of the period; others in the period around 1965 to 1975, and most have declined over the past two decades. The series as a whole, reflecting the first dimension of the factor presented in Table 2, grows dramatically and steadily over the post-war period to a high point in the late-1970s then declines in the 1980s before a peak in the 1990s; it is also quite volatile during this later period.

While it is difficult to follow the individual series in the Figure, it is also clear that some of the series track more closely the overall index and others are greatly volatile or follow an idiosyncratic trend.

Figure 6 presents a series and its component parts that are much more well behaved. It includes just three indicators of congressional behavior, those that loaded very highly on a single factor from Table 3: the total number of hearings and the number of roll call votes, separately for the House and Senate. Certain other congressional-focused series, such as the length of CQ Almanac coverage of congressional issues, are excluded.³

Figure 6 shows more consistency than Figure 5 but the peaks in the resulting index are remarkably similar: the late 1970s and the 1990s are the peaks, following a dramatic rise from 1948 to the 1970s, declines in the 1980s, and in the 2000s.

Figures 7 through 9 show the congressional activity scores (including CQ lines) for the three individual series we use as illustrations in this paper: civil rights, environment, and social security.

³CQ coverage of individual series might well load on a factor but overall levels are limited by the relatively constant size of the Almanac each year. So while the distribution of coverage from issue to issue may be a good indicator, the Almanac is not a good indicator of overall levels of activity, which is the question here. We include CQ lines in the individual series below.

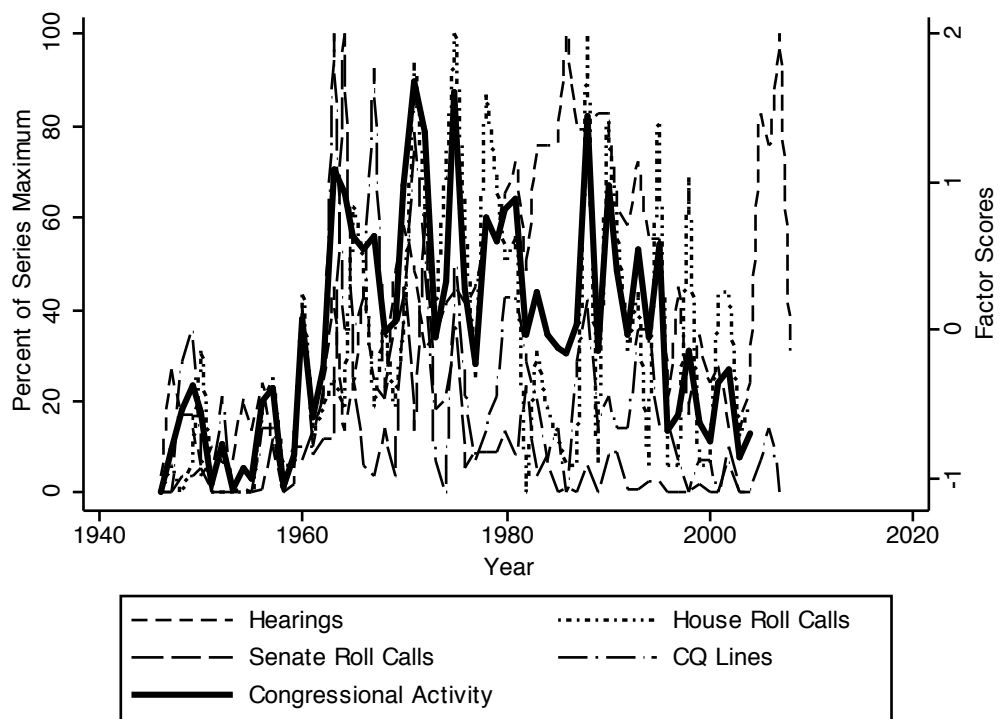


Figure 7: Congressional Activity Factor and Component Parts, Civil Rights

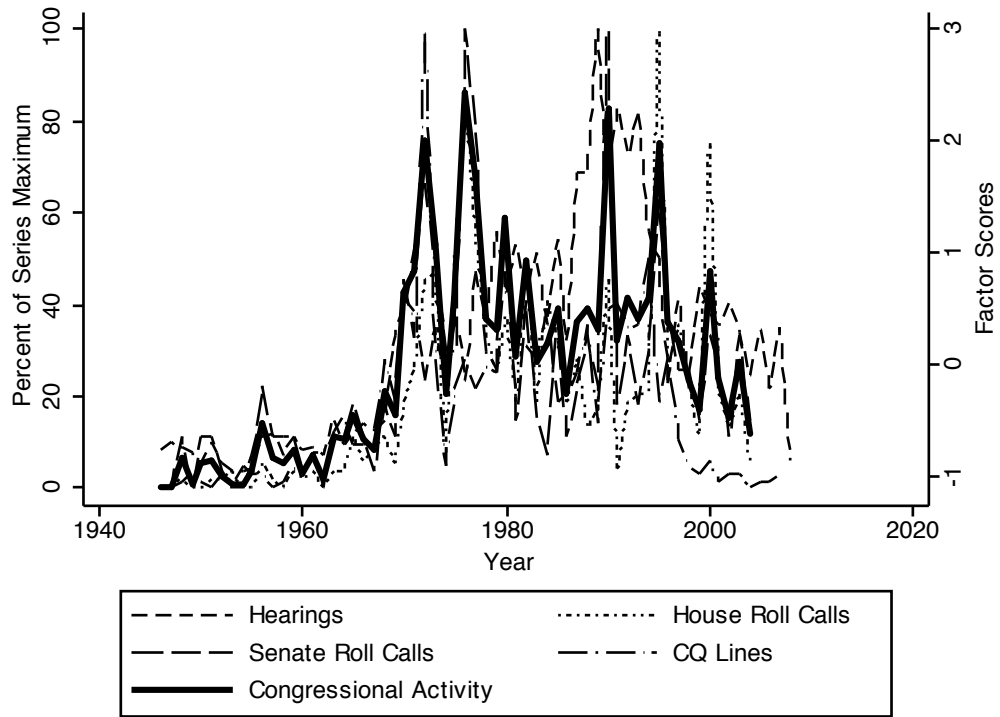


Figure 8: Congressional Activity Factor and Component Parts, Environment

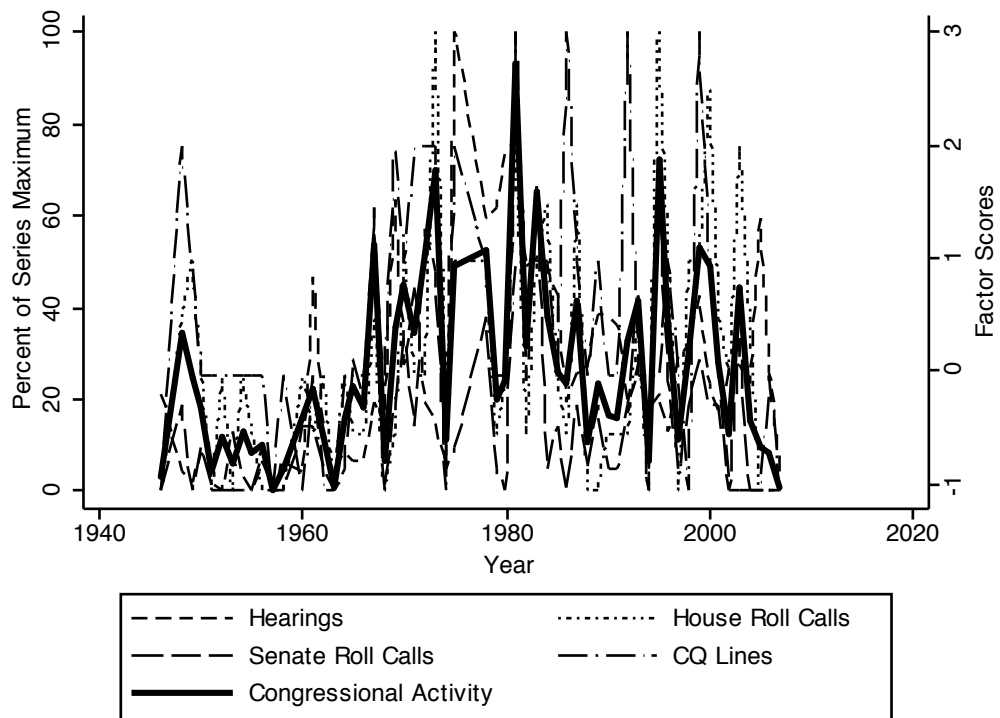


Figure 9: Congressional Activity Factor and Component Parts, Social Security

Figure 7 focuses on civil rights: attention shoots upwards in the early 1960s and the overall index remains above its average consistently from 1965 to 1985, though individual series show slightly different patterns. For the environment, in Figure 8, we see a slightly later emergence on the agenda, beginning in the late 1960s and sporadic high levels of attention through the 1990s. It also shows extremely low levels of attention in all of the series in the early post-war period. Social security, in Figure 9, shows much more sporadic attention, partially probably associated with greater sparseness in the underlying series: in spite of the huge amount of money involved in social security as compared to the other two issues, we saw in Table 3 there are fewer congressional actions in any given year. With that sparseness in the underlying data, we see greater volatility in the resulting index of activity.

Our indices of congressional and government activity are very highly correlated whether we look at overall levels of activity or at our individual series. Figure 10 shows the overall index and the congressional index for the four series together.

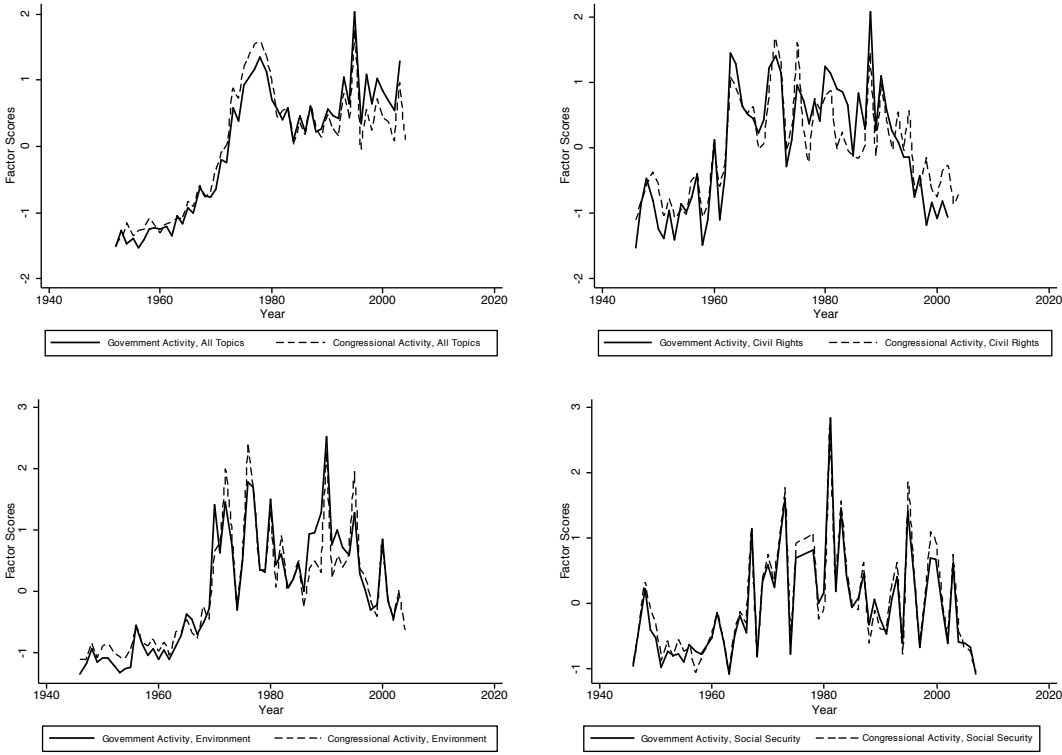


Figure 10: Government and Congressional Activity Factors

The high correlations between the two factor scores are obvious in Figure 10, which shows the two indicators of overall activity (upper left), civil rights (upper right), environment (lower left), and social security (lower right).

4.1 Comparing Levels of Activity and Mayhew's Important Laws

David Mayhew's first sweep of laws considered to be important at the time of passage is a widely accepted indicator of the degree of activism in government, so it is natural to assess whether these indicators of activity correspond to his. Further, as his list of important laws consists of 120 over the post-war period, it is clear that when these are broken down by specific policy areas there will be very few cases; none in some instances. Therefore, if we want to create a robust indicator of government liberalism or activism in order to compare this with public opinion mood, we need a measure that is robust and can be calculated separately for a large number of issue-domains.⁴ Therefore in this section we compare our indicators of activity with counts of net liberal laws generated by Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson (2008) by adding ideological codes to Mayhew's master list of important legislation, available on Mayhew's website. The results are sobering.

Figures 11 through 13 show the two indices of government activity on the left scale with our updated count of Mayhew's net liberal laws measure on the right scale. Net liberal laws is calculated as the weighted count (after counting particularly important laws, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, twice) of left-leaning laws minus right-leaning laws. There are relatively few right-leaning laws in most series (as conservative focus is often simply on slowing the pace of legislative activism), but there are a few and for social security the "net" indicator is negative in one instance, after the 1986 social security reforms which reduced the scope of the program by increasing the retirement age for future beneficiaries. It is reasonable to think that a count of the number of important laws would correlate with general measures of the activity level of Congress or the government as a whole, especially by issue-domain. The major laws might be expected to come in those issue-domains with the most activity.

⁴We hasten to note that this was not Mayhew's concern, and his indicator of overall policy liberalism or activity works well at the aggregate level. As we want to create an indicator that can be used for specific policy domains, however, we may not be able to use the very high threshold of importance that Mayhew used.

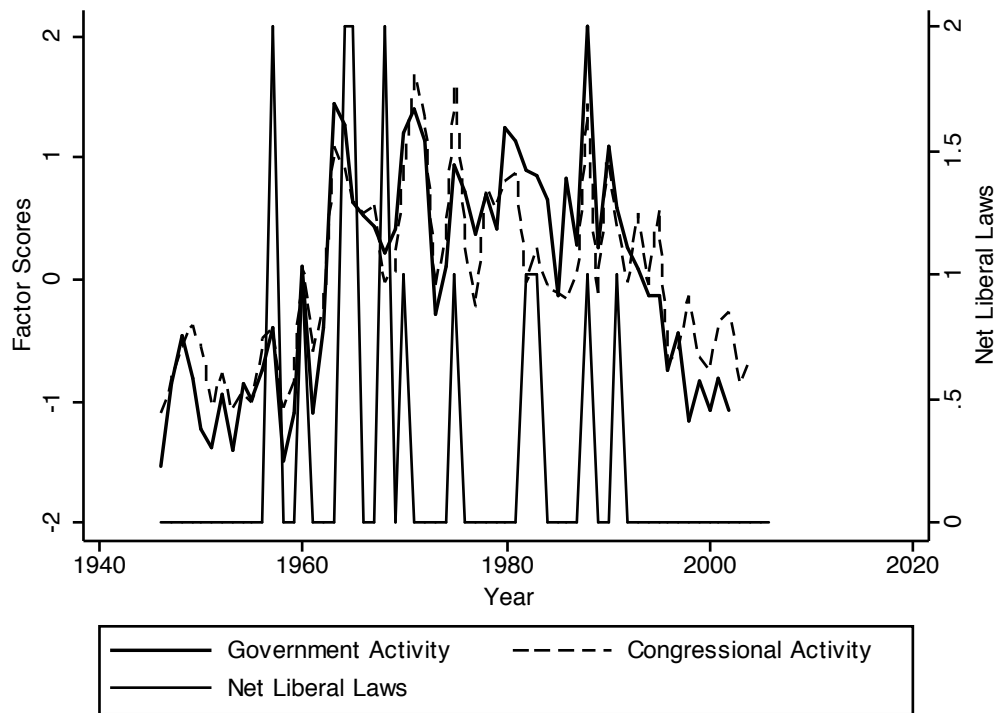


Figure 11: Civil Rights: Government Activity, Congressional Activity and Net Liberal Mayhew Laws

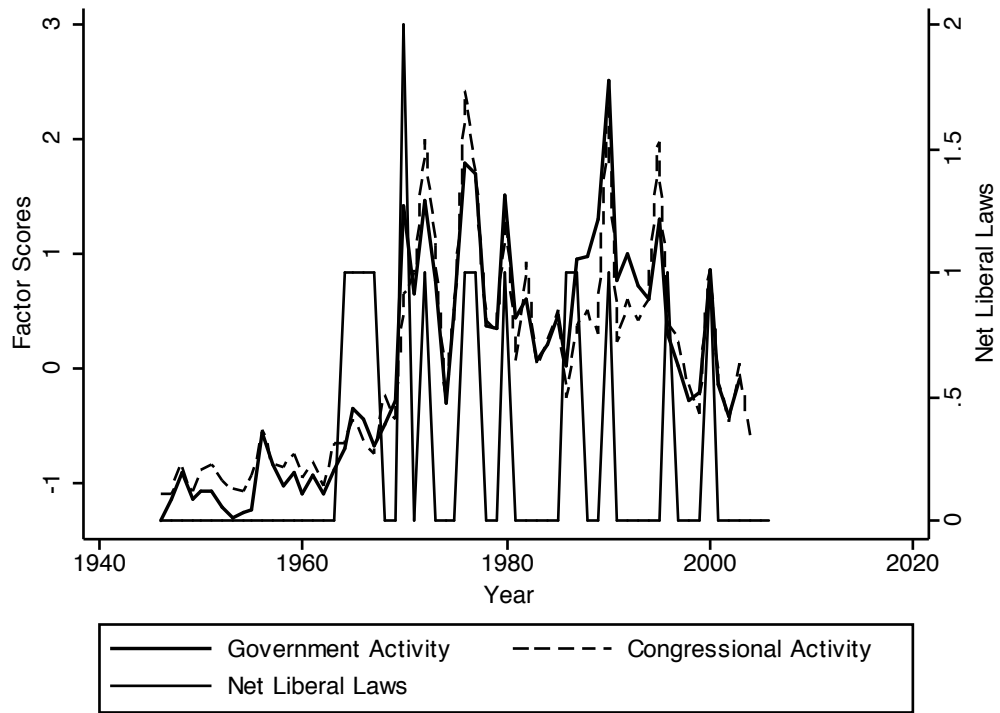


Figure 12: Environment: Government Activity, Congressional Activity and Net Liberal May-hew Laws

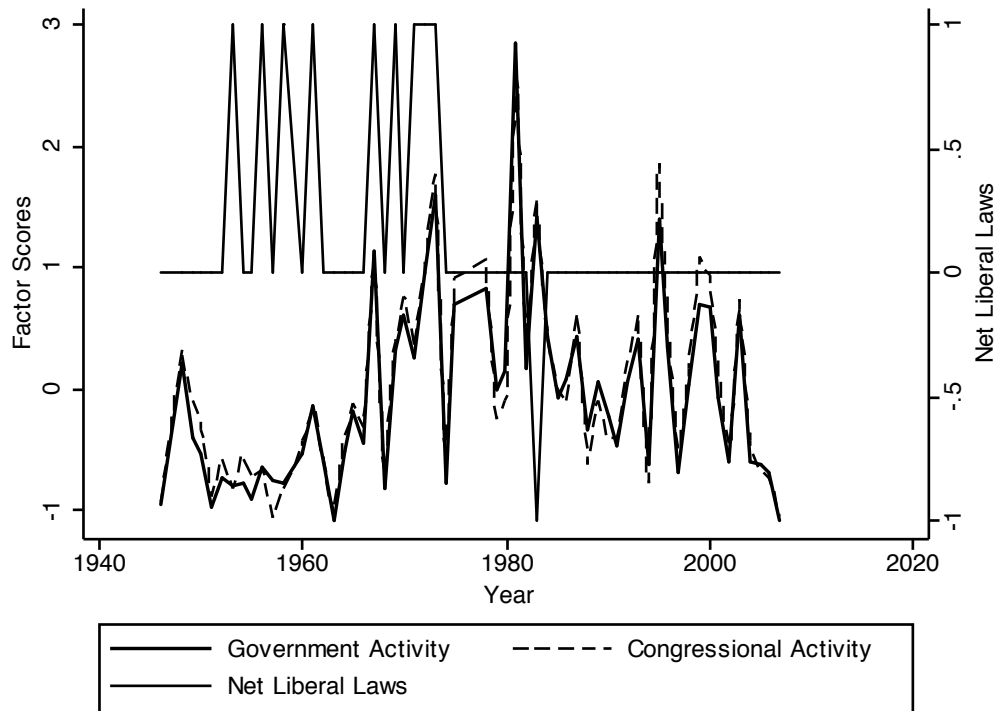


Figure 13: Social Security: Government Activity, Congressional Activity and Net Liberal Mayhew Laws

Figures 11 through 13 present a sobering picture, and Table 2 shows that the correlations among these series are relatively moderate, and in the case of social security, completely nonexistent.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix for Measures of Government Activity

	Government Activity	Congressional Activity	Hearings	Net Liberal Laws
A. All Topics				
Government Activity	1.00			
Congressional Activity	.97	1.00		
Hearings	.71	.72	1.00	
Net Liberal Laws
B. Civil Rights				
Government Activity	1.00			
Congressional Activity	.89	1.00		
Hearings	.69	.54	1.00	
Net Liberal Laws	.34	.28	-0.08	1.00
C. Environment				
Government Activity	1.00			
Congressional Activity	.95	1.00		
Hearings	.77	.60	1.00	
Net Liberal Laws	.45	.39	.03	1.00
D. Social Security				
Government Activity	1.00			
Congressional Activity	.98	1.00		
Hearings	.53	.47	1.00	
Net Liberal Laws	.02	-.01	-.08	1.00

For Civil Rights, in Figure 11, a number of important laws came during the period of heightened activity as assessed by the broader indicators of government or congressional activity, but the individual years when the laws come are not necessarily those with the highest index scores. The Mayhew indicator is relatively sparse here as well, with just a total of 15 important laws (all of which were coded in the liberal direction) in the entire post-war period. Table 5B shows that there is a correlation of approximately 0.34 between Mayhew laws and our overall index.

For the case of the Environment (Figure 12), we see similar trends and a slightly higher correlation in Table 5C (0.45), but matters turn decidedly negative when we look at social security where there is virtually no relation between the two series (Figure 9, table 5D).

If the two indicators are supposed to be measuring the same underlying concept, this suggests that scholars will have a very hard time demonstrating the validity of their theories if the two indicators correlate at such a low level.

5 Mood and Public Policy

In this section we review the linkages between public mood and the Mayhew v. Policy Agendas measures of government activity. As is suggested by the previous section, the results are sobering. While there are similar relations at the global level, when we break the relations down by individual policy domains, many problems emerge. Mostly these relate to the sparseness of the data on some issues (that is, there may be very few government activities, too few to support a robust indicator that truly taps into the legislative “tenor of the times”), but the comparison of our three issues also suggests some more substantive problems: Some issues are more budgetary, some more regulatory, some can be resolved by a few laws followed by lower-salience regulations, and others involve sustained legislative activity. Further, on the public opinion side, some individual issues, such as support for civil rights, trend upwards throughout the entire series. Finally, it is interesting to compare overall levels of public mood with levels of government activism: there is no clear correspondence between, say, 60 percent public approval and a certain amount of governmental response. Figures 14 and 15 show the links between mood and activity first using the government activity index just developed and then using Mayhew’s “net liberal laws.”

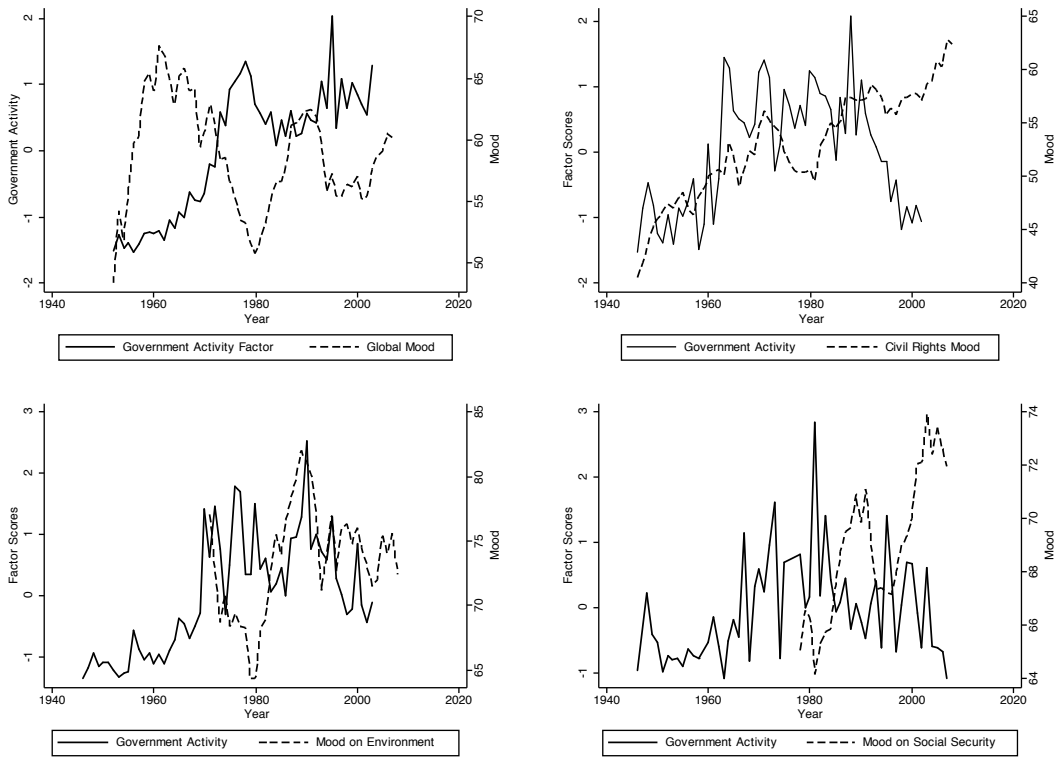


Figure 14: Mood and the Government Activity Factor, By Topic

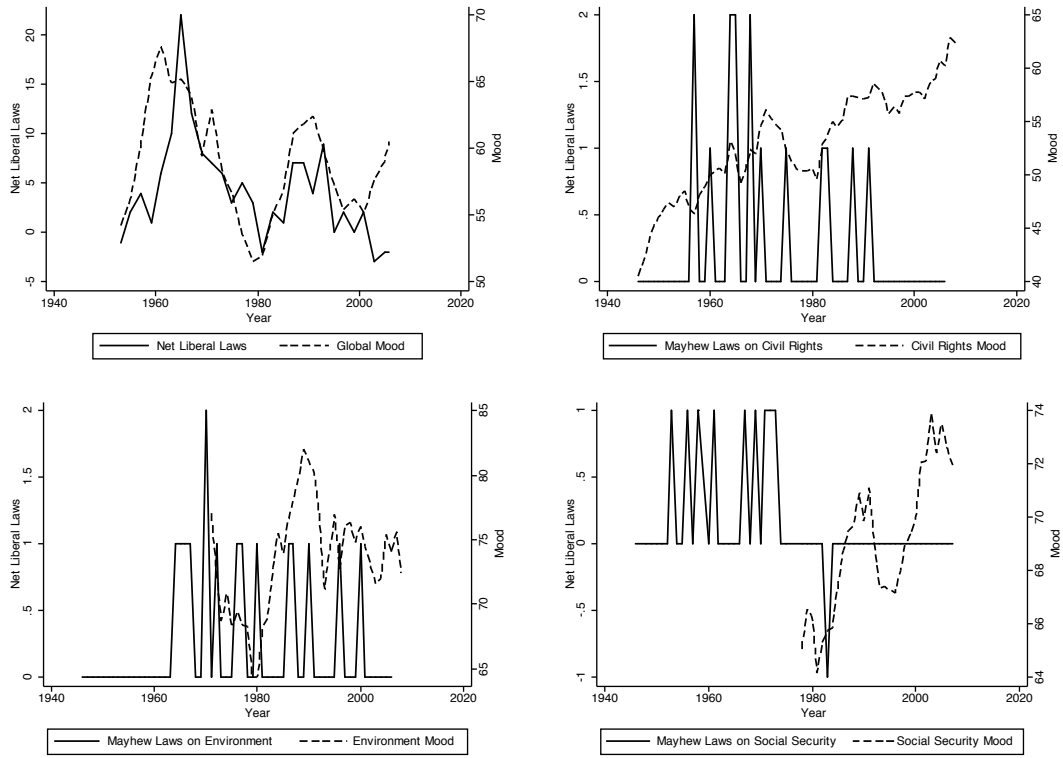


Figure 15: Mood and Net Liberal Mayhew Laws, By Topic

Looking first at the upper-left graph in each figure, showing overall mood v. overall government activity, it is clear that at least a similar relationship is apparent. But as we go through the individual series the relations are less clear, they are different from issue to issue, and the agendas and Mayhew series do not always correspond. The Civil Rights series is interesting because opinion trends upwards throughout virtually the entire series but measures of government activity reach their peaks early in the series. It might be that norms of equality have permeated throughout society so legislative activity is no longer as urgent, but it is also clear that increasing levels of public acceptance of statements of equality are no longer being met by higher levels of government activity in this area. Is voting rights different from more contemporary manifestations of civil rights controversy? Are the opinion series overstating support for racial equality “on the ground”? We do not know the cause of the more recent disconnect, but it is clearly there.

Environment similarly shows an upward-trending opinion series but no similar trend for public policy. And in the social security case we see a strong upward trend for public opinion but no such corresponding movement for policy; in this case we see a very thin Mayhew series; Congress simply passes very few important laws in this area.

What can we say about this exercise? First, the global relations among opinion and activity clearly mask substantial variation from issue to issue. We hope to explore and explain these differences in future research. Second, measures clearly matter, and no single indicator of policy activity may capture what scholars are interested in for all policy domains. Just as the links between opinion and policy may differ across domains, so too may the most appropriate indicator of government activity may differ across those domains as well. This increases the difficulty of the analysis considerably.

We conclude this analysis by engaging in one additional empirical exercise: error correction models.

5.1 Policy-Specific Representation via Error Correction

Mood is known to predict the policy response of government. Using several different conceptions of policy, Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) and Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002) demonstrate that changes in global mood lead to changes in global (i.e., left-right) policy activity and policy. One of those analyses chooses for a dependent variable a recoded version of David Mayhew’s (1991) important law series. With each of the Mayhew “first sweep” laws coded for direction, left or right, and importance, it is shown that changes in public policy mood predict changes in important law-making.

Here we replicate that analysis, but adding 10 years of data that have become available in the interim. And then we ask whether what works globally also works within policy domain. To preview findings to come, these are extraordinarily challenging hypotheses. The reason is that the Mayhew laws are an extremely thin data series. The measure is a count in which zero values are not uncommon and year-to-year variation is small. In the Erikson et al. analysis the global relationship found is statistically significant but far from powerful. This is in decided contrast to other, more richly measured, policy measures, which show quite powerful relationships.

When we break down the Mayhew series into policy domains, it becomes considerably weaker. Important laws are uncommon in total and extremely uncommon disaggregated into specific policy areas. Here the modal score is zero and non-zero values are relatively rare and relatively small.

We present the analysis as a series of error correction models in Table 5. There we can see that the global relationship persists, although only the long-term component is significant in the right direction. None of the policy-specific analyses shows significant relationships between policy-specific mood and the passage of important laws. The racial case comes close. The short-term effect of racial mood on racial laws has a p value of .08 one-tailed. But the other structural coefficients are clear calls of non-significance.

Table 5: Predicting Important Laws from Estimated Mood and Policy-Specific Mood: Error Correction Models, Δ Laws Dependent

Variable	Dependent Variable			
	Global Mood	Racial Mood	Social Security Mood	Environment Mood
Laws _{t-1}	-0.61* (0.19)	-0.91* (0.13)	-1.10* (0.20)	-1.04* (0.18)
Δ Mood _t	-0.81 ^w (0.39)	0.09 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Mood _t	0.45* (0.21)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)
Intercept	-23.52 (12.39)	0.47 (0.88)	-1.44 (0.99)	0.18 (1.38)
N	26	49	29	35
Adj. R ²	.30	.46	.50	.48

The dependent variable for each analysis is the relevant version of Mayhew laws. Standard errors in parentheses.

The global analysis is biennial, all others annual.

* $p < .05$, w wrong signed relationship

What is wrong with these analyses is clear. We can evaluate the measurement quality of the policy-specific mood estimates and find it quite good on average, not as strong as global mood, but roughly in the same neighborhood. The failure quite clearly is in the dependent variable, which is just too intermittent in specific policy areas to produce much valid variance. This problem is inherent. There just aren't enough important laws.

6 Concluding Thoughts

We have presented both our process of integrating policy mood with Policy Agendas and the successes and issues we have faced in that process. In theory, the idea is simple enough: our goal is to make policy-specific mood series using the coding scheme of the Policy Agendas Project. In practice, this has generated serious issues, some that we could not predict and have yet to solve. Nonetheless, our story is a positive one: we have made good progress in the journey to providing policy-specific mood scores for interested scholars. Insofar as these scholars attempt to match these mood scores with governmental activity or governmental response, they will be met with challenge, but we persist in optimism about the future of these endeavors.

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