

# The Rise of the Senior Rights Movement and Congressional Attention to Elderly Issues



Laura M. Tach

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# Overview

The elderly population is an object of growing attention from social scientists, doctors, and politicians. This increase in attention occurred for several reasons:

- The elderly constitute a growing portion of the population.
- The elderly have a wide array of government programs and spending devoted to them.
- The elderly are a vocal constituency who participate actively in voting and other activities.
- Almost everyone will be a part of this population one day.

# Demographics

- The elderly are a growing portion of the U.S. population that will increase rapidly in the next 50 years. Their growing size and special needs make them a logical target for congressional attention.

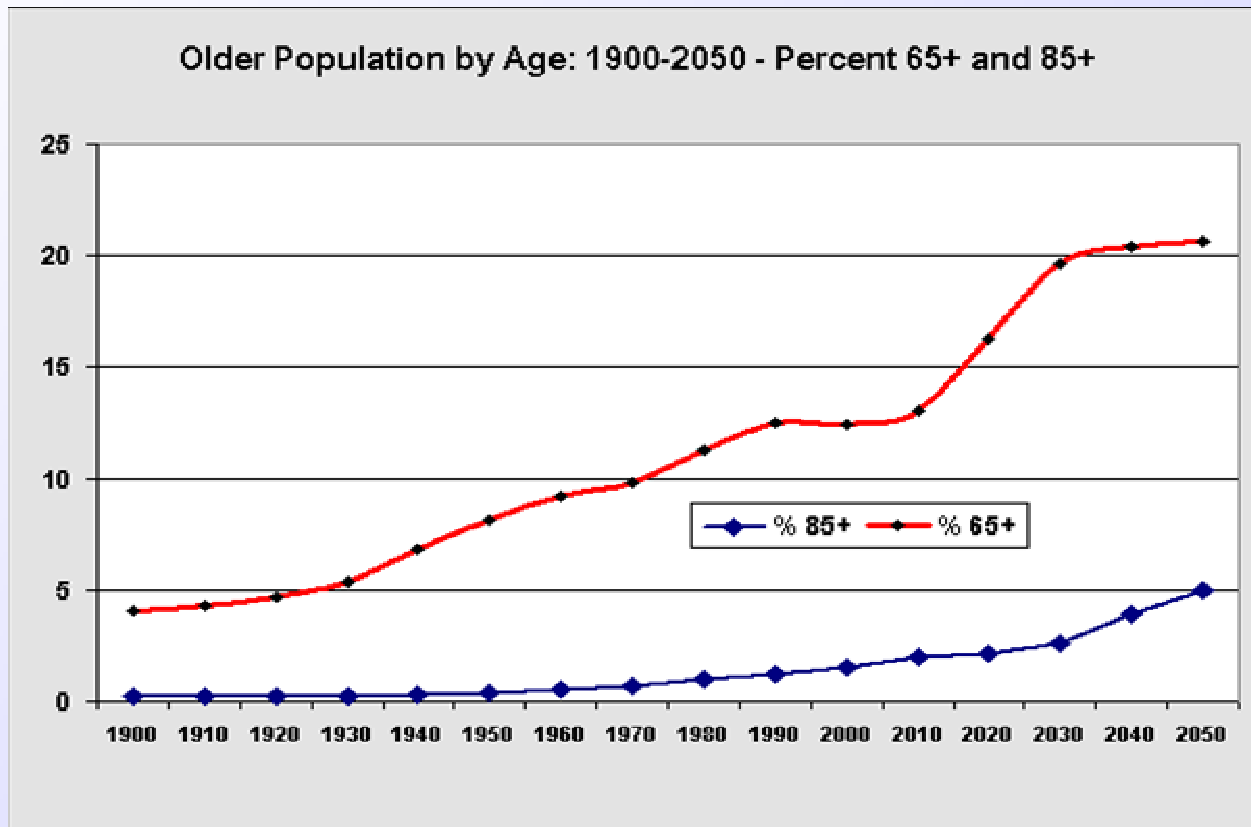


Table compiled by the U.S. Administration on Aging based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau

# Why the Elderly?

- There are many special populations that could be considered “deserving” of congressional attention.
- There are factors other than demographics involved in “shaping” what issues Congress considers important.
- Important to consider the historical context in which issues are brought to Congressional attention and how the population involved responds to the actions of the government: a “dynamic process.”

# Incipiency Stage (1920-1950)

- In the 1920's, seniors were more likely to be poor than the average American. They were one of the populations most adversely affected by the Depression (Williamson et al. 1982).
- Social Security Act of 1935
  - Senior interest groups were not a major factor in the passing of this legislation.
  - Existing groups were not large or well-organized.
  - Labor groups were largely responsible for the provisions that benefited retirees.

# Coalescence Stage (1950-1980)

- Elderly activity in interest groups and politics were spurred by the very programs they are now mobilized to defend.
  - Better standard of living
  - Able to retire
  - Live independently
  - They now had “something to lose”
- Large wave of organizations founded in the 1970s and continue to exist today.
  - They continue to thrive by actively recruiting members, lobbying Congress on new proposals, and offering products and services to their members.

# The Institutional Stage (1980-2000)

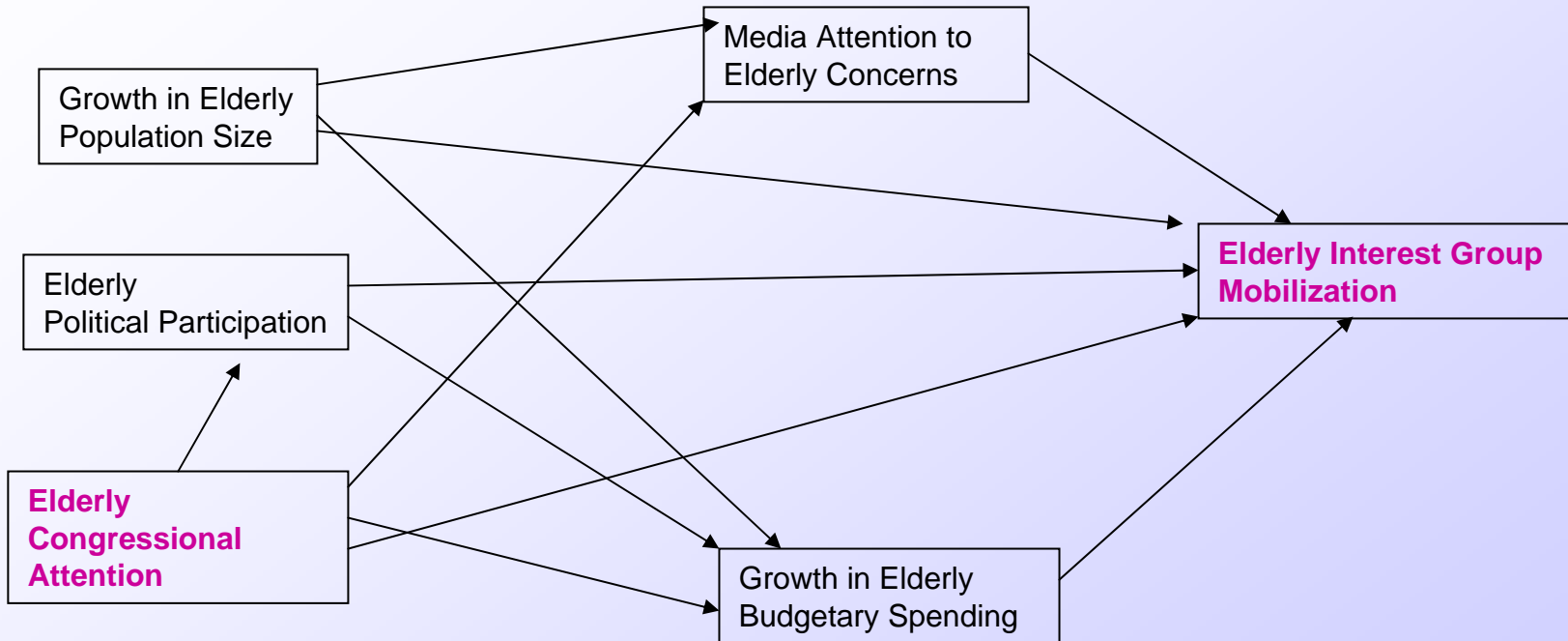
- Seniors have successfully fought to keep and increase their benefits, through both organizations and political pressure.
- Government is responsive to political pressure by seniors and organizations representing senior interest, such as AARP.
- All age groups exhibit strong support for Social Security and elderly issues, increasing their legitimacy.
- Expansion of specific government agencies designed to manage senior programs and provide information to Congress and the public concerning the elderly. These include the Administration on Aging (AoA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA).

# Historical Timeline

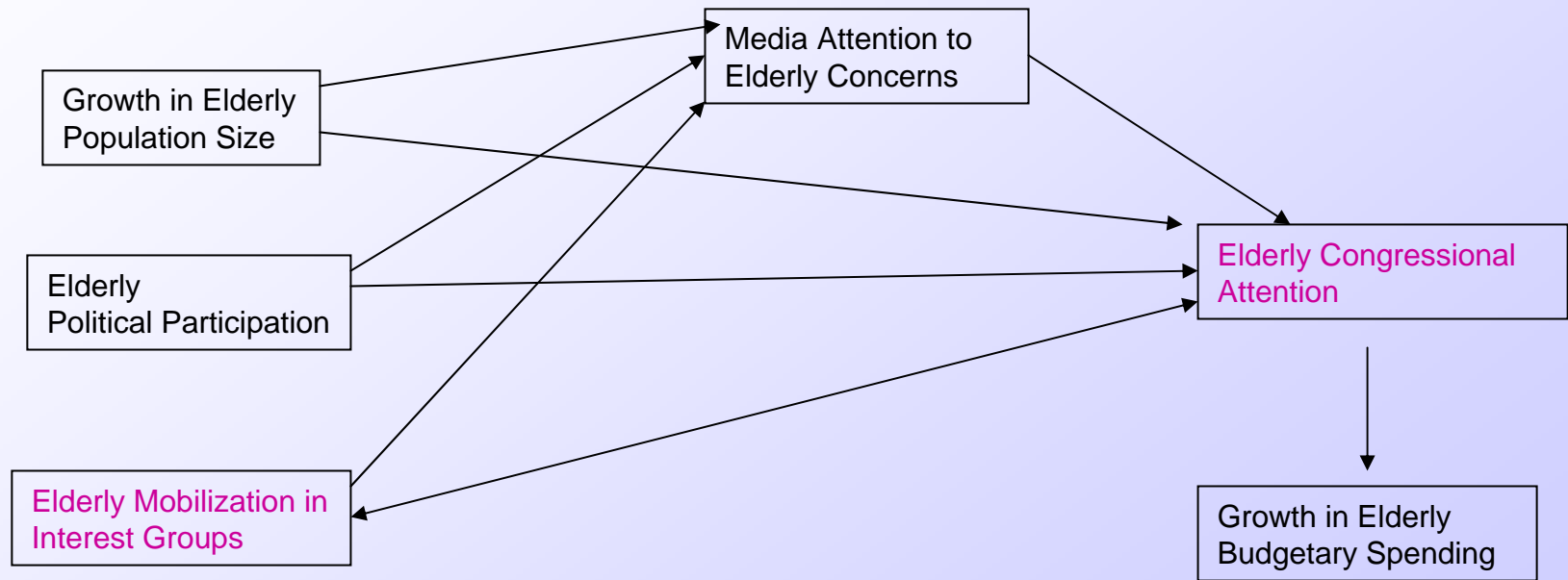
- 1935 – Social Security Act
- 1940 – 1<sup>st</sup> Social Security Payments made
- 1947– Founding of AARP (formerly NRTA)
- 1961 – White House Conference on Aging
- 1965 – Older Americans Act
  - Medicare
  - Administration on Aging Founded
- 1974 – House special committee on aging
- 1981 – Reagan proposes benefit cuts



# Theoretical Model (1935-1950)



# Theoretical Model (1950-2000)



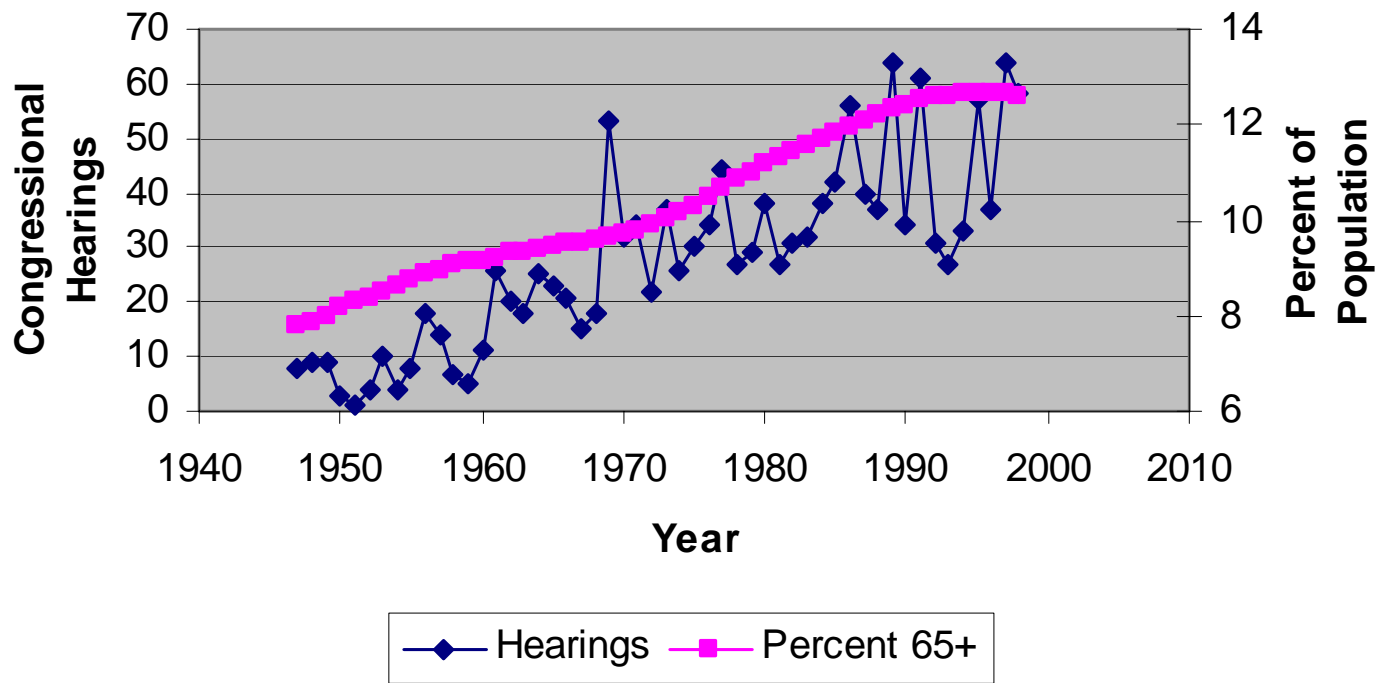
# Data & Methods

- Elderly Population Size
  - Percent of population 65+
  - U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstracts
- Political Participation
  - Percent of those who voted who were 65+
  - National Election Studies
- Interest Group Mobilization
  - Subject headings “aging,” “retirees,” “retirement,” and “social security”
  - Encyclopedia of Associations (every 10 years)

# Data & Methods

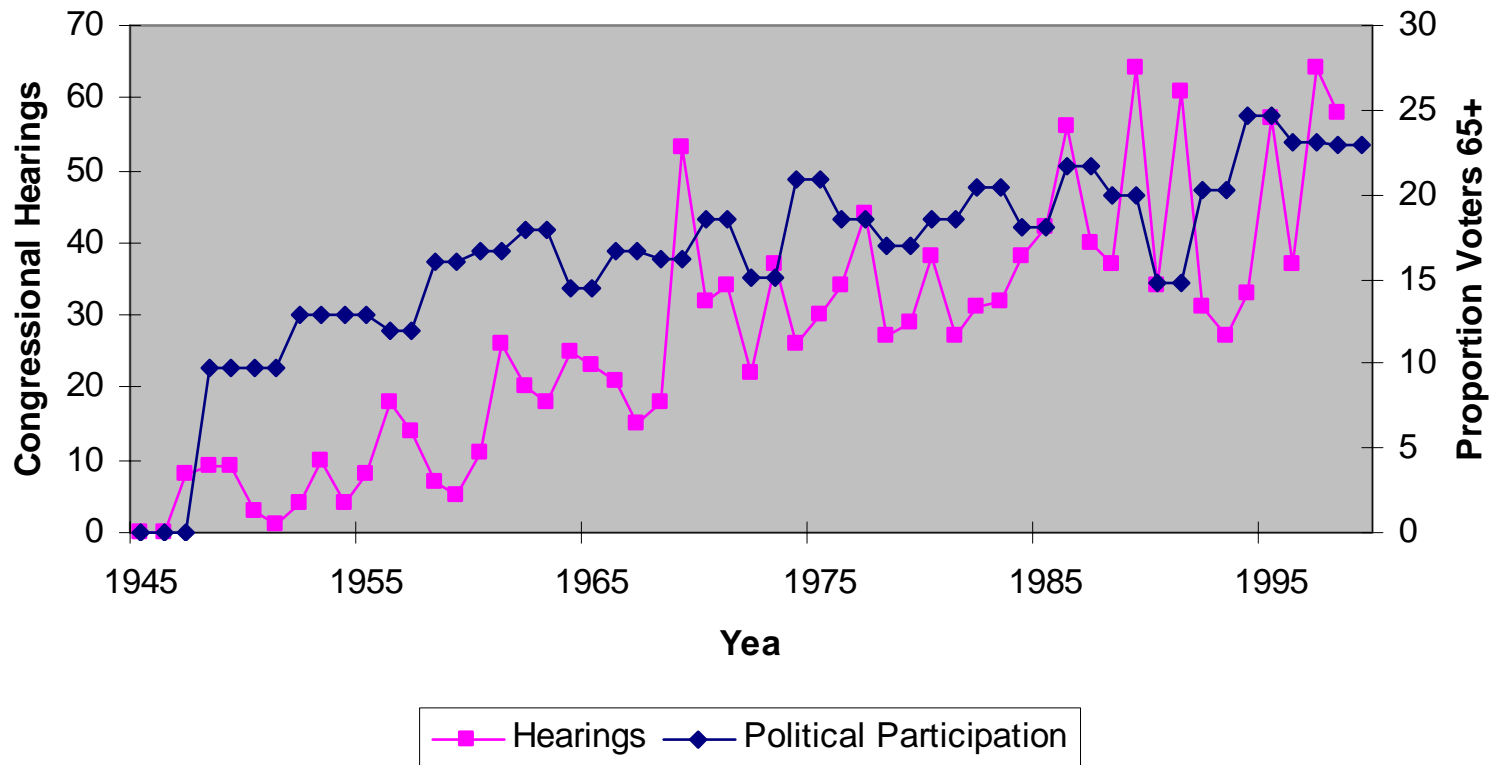
- Media Attention
  - Keywords: “age discrimination” and (“social security” or aged or elderly or senior\*)
  - NY Times Historical
- Budget
  - Includes Medicare, Social Security, and general retirement insurance
  - Agendas Project
- Social Security Benefits
  - Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin
- Congressional Attention
  - Data adapted from Baumgartner & Mahoney (2003) from the Agendas Project

## Congressional Hearings and Percent of Population who are 65+



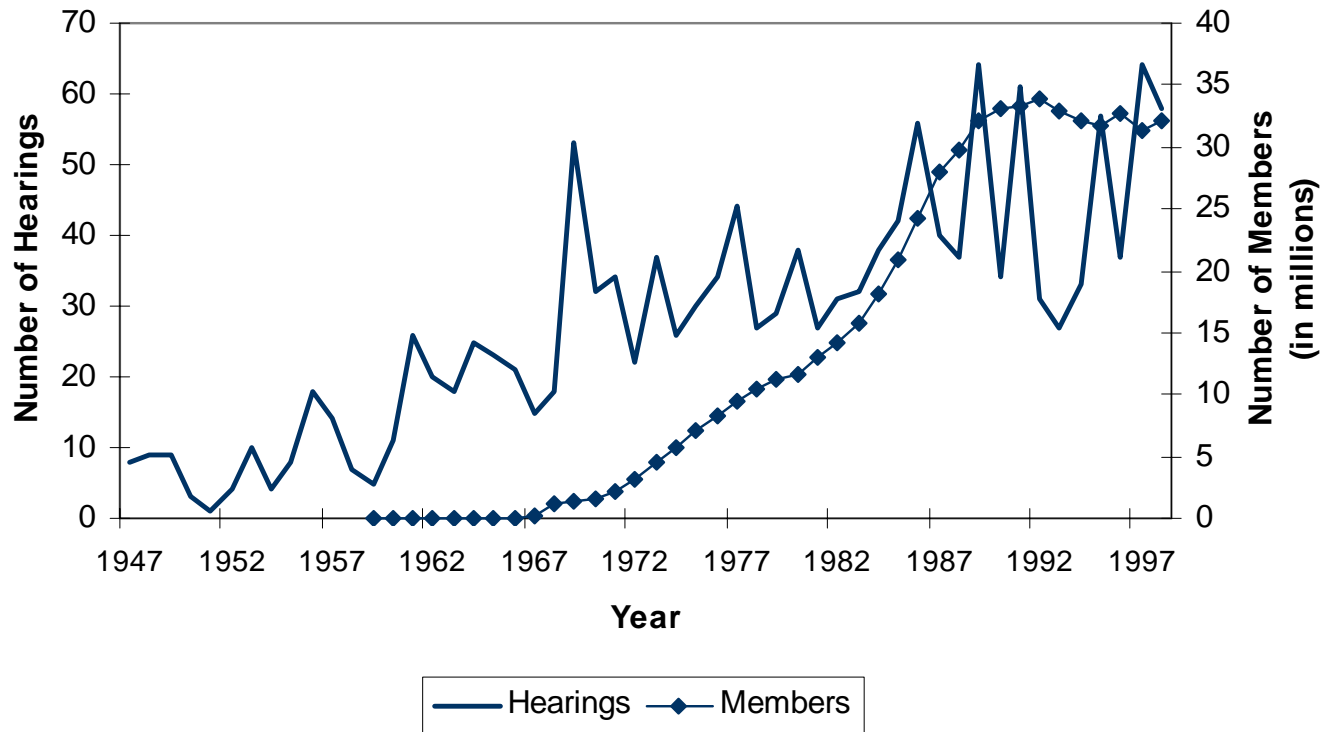
Data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Agendas Project.

## Congressional Hearings and Proportion of Voters 65+



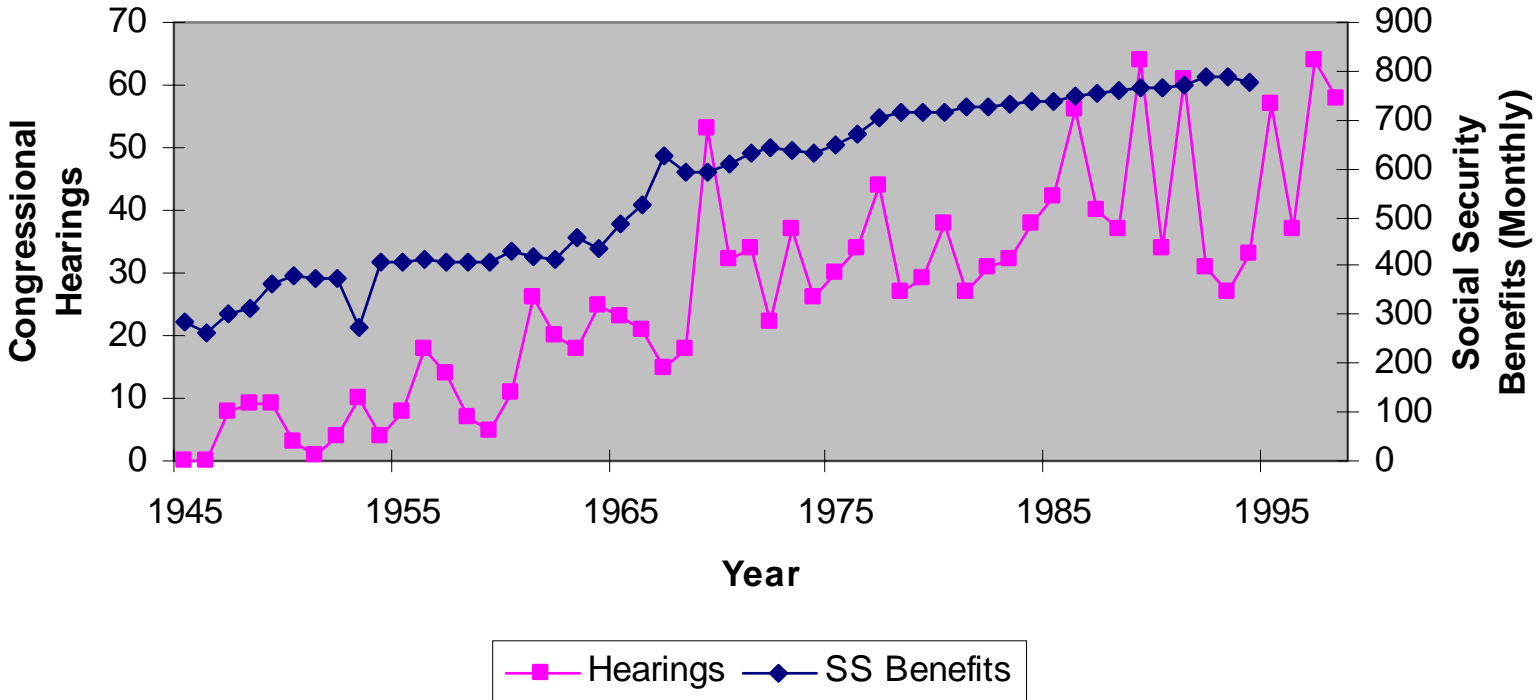
Data from the National Election Studies and the Agendas Project.

## Congressional Hearings on Elderly Issues and AARP Membership



(From Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2004: Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda)

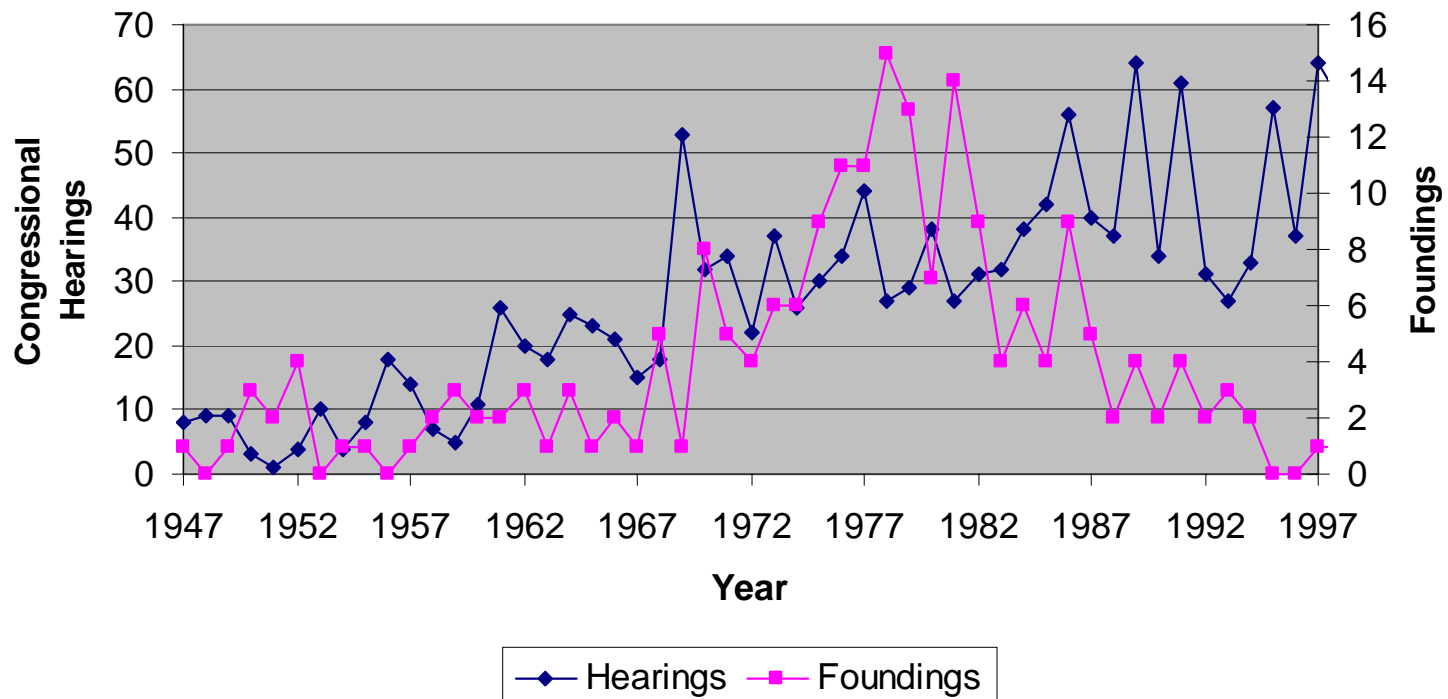
## Congressional Hearings and Value of Social Security Benefits



Data from the Social Security Administration and the Agendas Project.

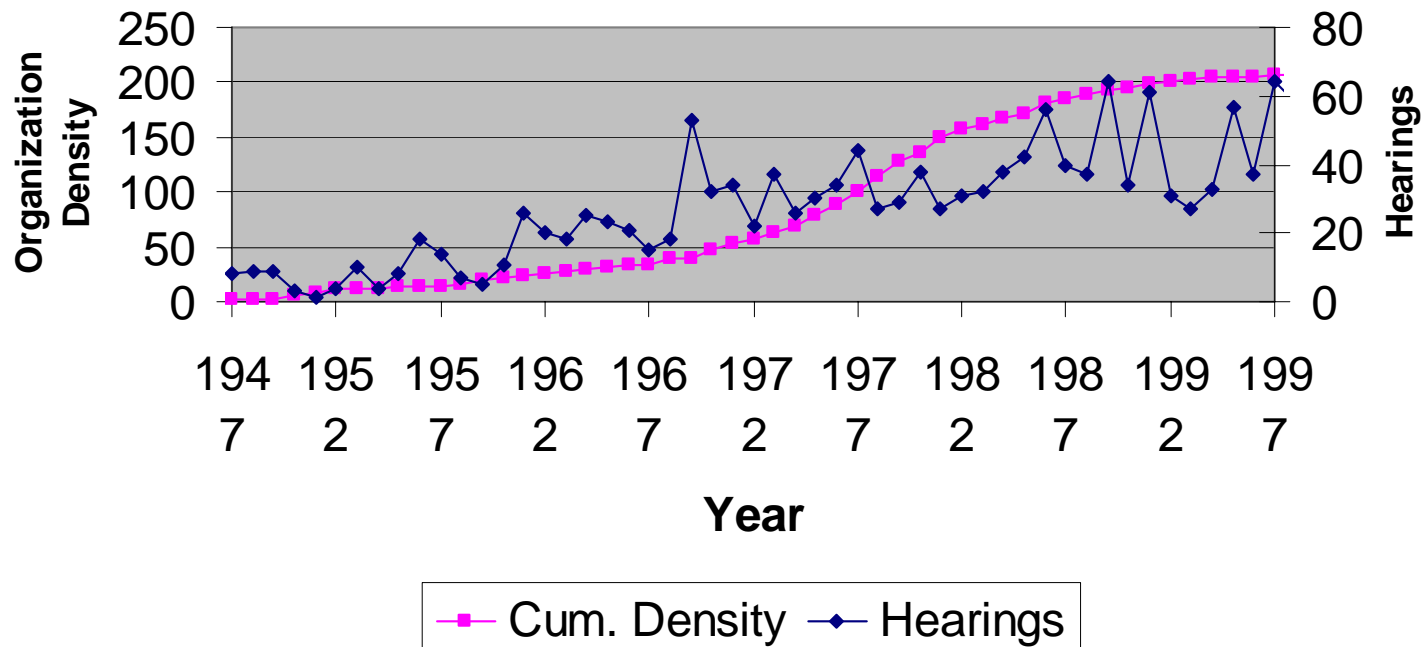


## Congressional Hearings on Elderly Issues and Senior Organization Foundings



Data from the Encyclopedia of Associations and the Agendas Project.

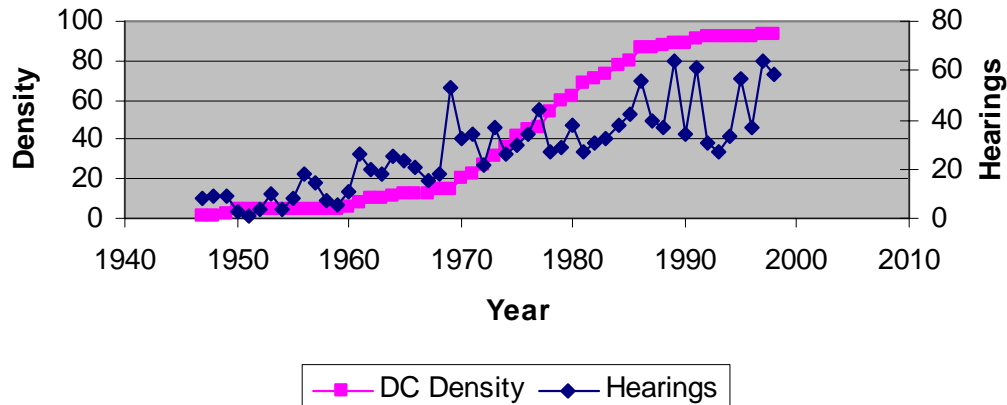
## Congressional Hearings on Elderly Issues and Senior Organizational Density



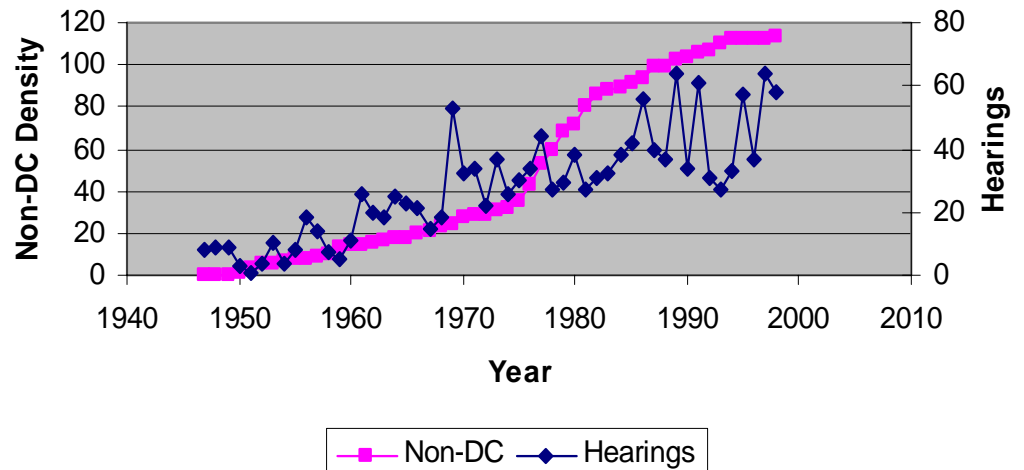
Data from the Encyclopedia of Associations and the Agendas Project.

The organizations were separated into professional/membership and DC-based/non-DC. There were no large differences in these trends.

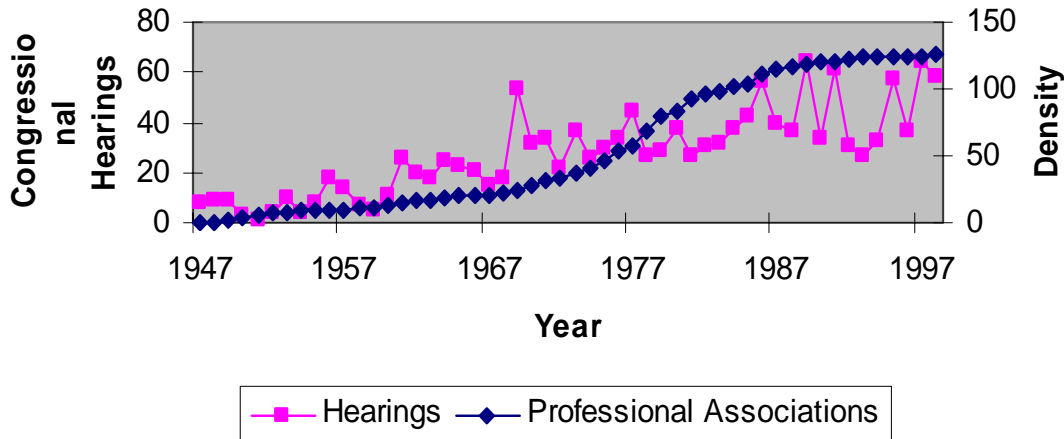
### Congressional Hearings and Density of DC Organizations



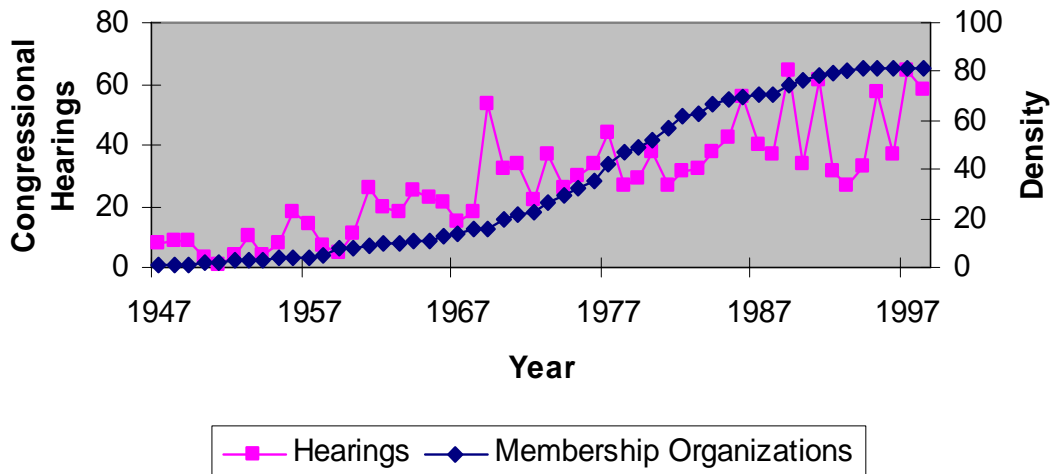
### Congressional Hearings and Non-DC Density



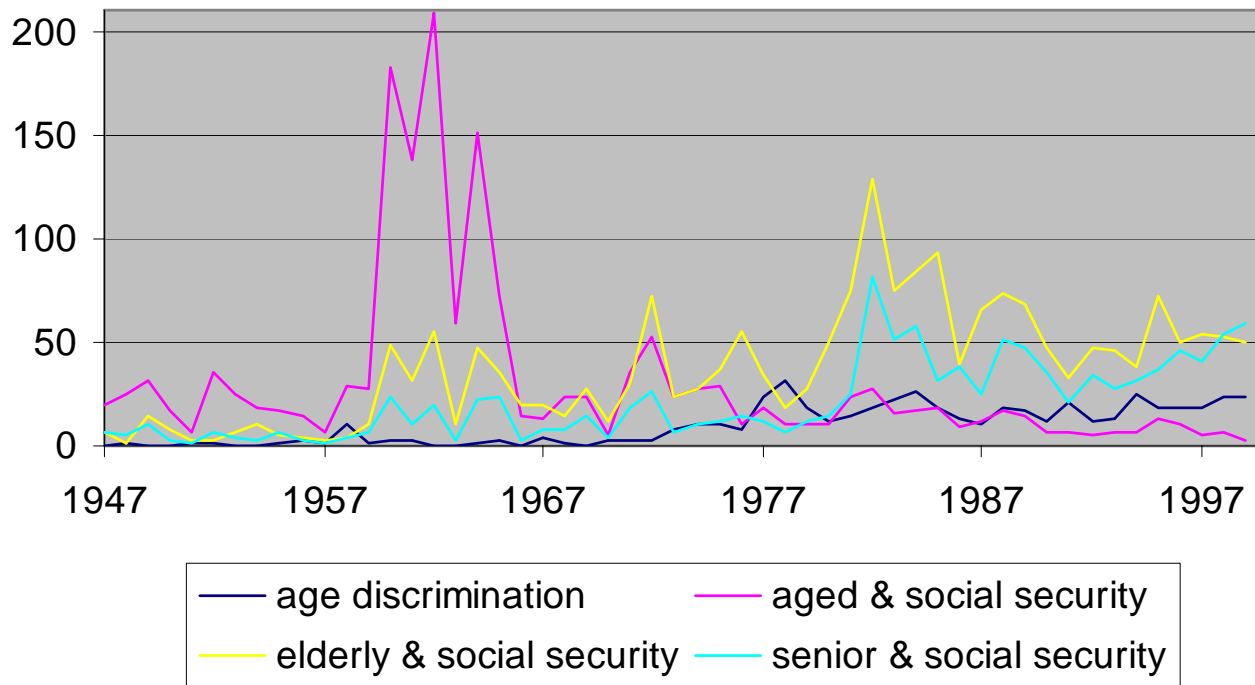
### Congressional Hearings and Professional Density



### Congressional Hearings and Membership Density

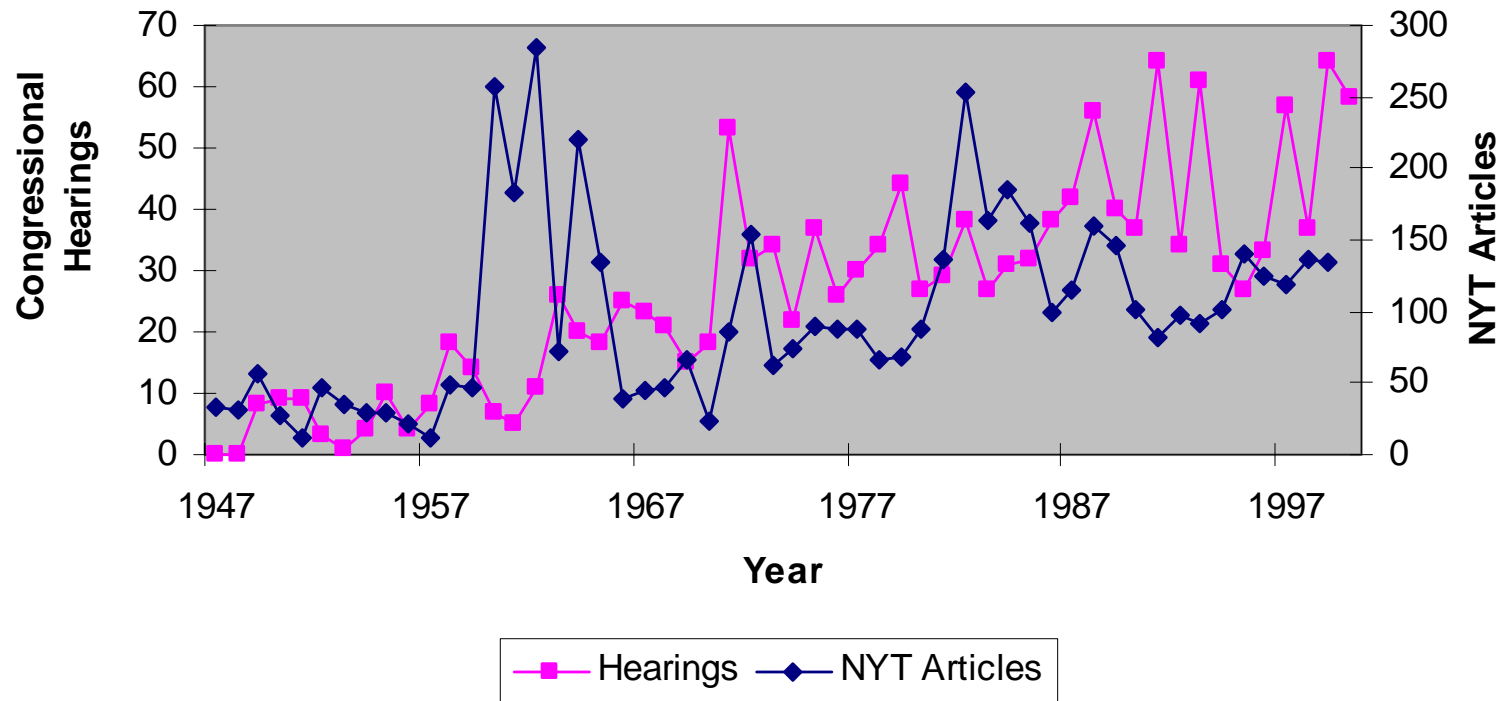


## Key Terms Used to Assess Media Attention to Elderly Issues



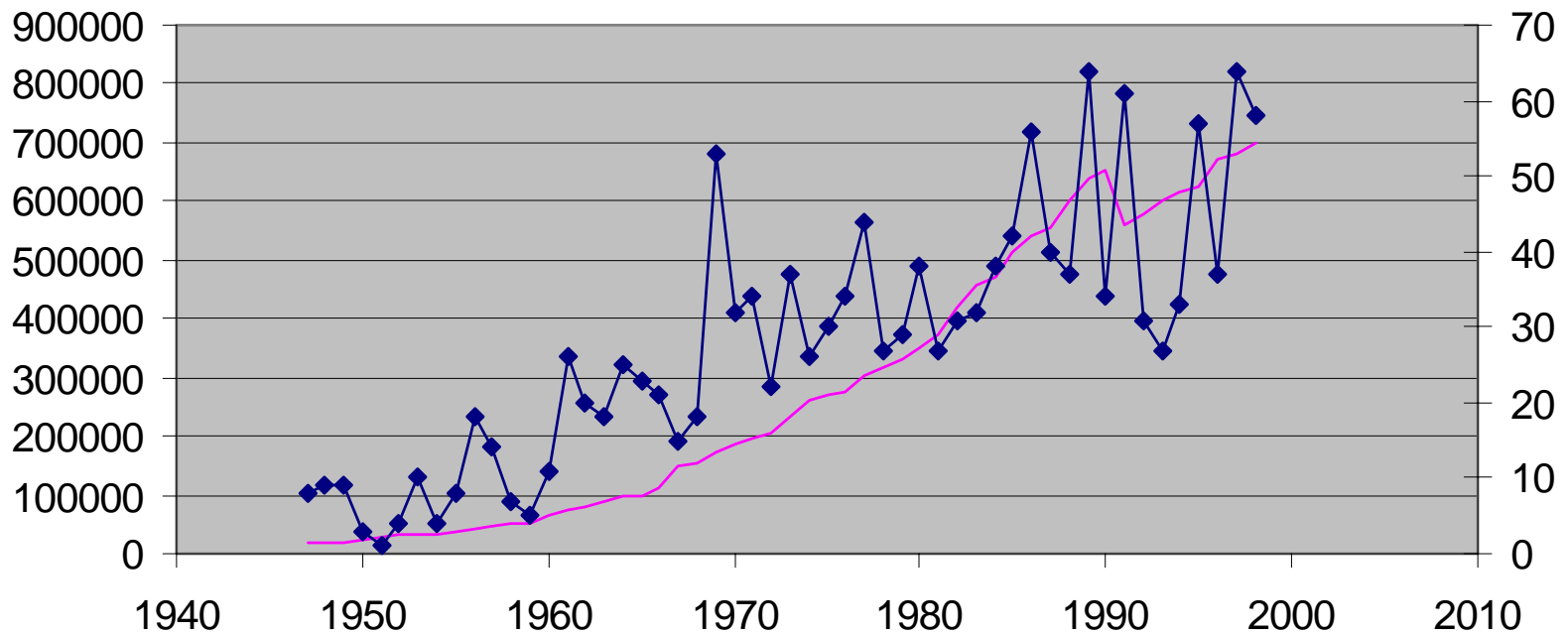
Data from the New York Times Historical.

## Congressional Hearings and Media Attention to Elderly Issues



Data from the New York Times Historical and the Agendas Project.

## Congressional Hearings and Budget



Data from the Agendas Project.

### Correlations

		HEARING	AARP	CUMDENS	FOUNDING	PCT65	BUDGET	POLVOTE	MEDIA	SSBEN98
HEARING	Pearson Correlation	1	.656**	.784**	.213	.811**	.809**	.690**	.226	.798**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.130	.000	.000	.000	.111	.000
	N	52	40	52	52	52	52	51	51	49
AARP	Pearson Correlation	.656**	1	.968**	-.174	.981**	.979**	.609**	.097	.908**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.282	.000	.000	.000	.559	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	39	40
CUMDENS	Pearson Correlation	.784**	.968**	1	.221	.985**	.990**	.757**	.351*	.956**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.115	.000	.000	.000	.011	.000
	N	52	40	52	52	52	52	51	51	49
FOUNDING	Pearson Correlation	.213	-.174	.221	1	.227	.159	.225	.221	.291*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.130	.282	.115	.	.106	.261	.112	.119	.042
	N	52	40	52	52	52	52	51	51	49
PCT65	Pearson Correlation	.811**	.981**	.985**	.227	1	.982**	.807**	.381**	.968**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.106	.	.000	.000	.006	.000
	N	52	40	52	52	52	52	51	51	49
BUDGET	Pearson Correlation	.809**	.979**	.990**	.159	.982**	1	.780**	.313*	.952**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.261	.000	.	.000	.025	.000
	N	52	40	52	52	52	55	52	51	50
POLVOTE	Pearson Correlation	.690**	.609**	.757**	.225	.807**	.780**	1	.510**	.789**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.112	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	51	40	51	51	51	52	52	50	50
MEDIA	Pearson Correlation	.226	.097	.351*	.221	.381**	.313*	.510**	1	.270
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.111	.559	.011	.119	.006	.025	.000	.	.063
	N	51	39	51	51	51	51	50	53	48
SSBEN98	Pearson Correlation	.798**	.908**	.956**	.291*	.968**	.952**	.789**	.270	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.042	.000	.000	.000	.063	.
	N	49	40	49	49	49	50	50	48	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



### Correlations

		HEARING	%aarp	%cumdens	%founding	%pop65	%budget	%ssben98	%polvote	%media
HEARING	Pearson Correlation	1	-.269	-.425**	-.044	-.611**	-.397**	-.186	-.104	-.126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.098	.002	.757	.000	.004	.206	.472	.379
	N	52	39	51	51	51	51	48	50	51
%aarp	Pearson Correlation	-.269	1	.306	.407*	-.147	-.030	.328*	-.059	-.198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.098	.	.058	.010	.371	.856	.041	.721	.232
	N	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	38
%cumdens	Pearson Correlation	-.425**	.306	1	.299*	.491**	.190	.213	.068	.240
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.058	.	.033	.000	.181	.146	.641	.094
	N	51	39	51	51	51	51	48	50	50
%founding	Pearson Correlation	-.044	.407*	.299*	1	-.032	-.092	.186	.122	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.757	.010	.033	.	.825	.521	.207	.399	.788
	N	51	39	51	51	51	51	48	50	50
%pop65	Pearson Correlation	-.611**	-.147	.491**	-.032	1	.001	.140	.029	.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.371	.000	.825	.	.996	.343	.843	.508
	N	51	39	51	51	51	51	48	50	50
%budget	Pearson Correlation	-.397**	-.030	.190	-.092	.001	1	-.273	.096	.416**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.856	.181	.521	.996	.	.058	.502	.003
	N	51	39	51	51	51	54	49	51	50
%ssben98	Pearson Correlation	-.186	.328*	.213	.186	.140	-.273	1	-.140	-.435**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.206	.041	.146	.207	.343	.058	.	.337	.002
	N	48	39	48	48	48	49	49	49	47
%polvote	Pearson Correlation	-.104	-.059	.068	.122	.029	.096	-.140	1	.236
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.472	.721	.641	.399	.843	.502	.337	.	.102
	N	50	39	50	50	50	51	49	51	49
%media	Pearson Correlation	-.126	-.198	.240	.039	.096	.416**	-.435**	.236	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.379	.232	.094	.788	.508	.003	.002	.102	.
	N	51	38	50	50	50	50	47	49	52

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.723 <sup>a</sup>	.522	.352	11.267

a. Predictors: (Constant), AARP, MEDIA, PRES, FOUNDING, POLVOTE, YEAR2, SSBEN98, CUMDENS, BUDGET, PCT65

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-280.569	418.278		-.671	.508		
	CUMDENS	-.517	.620	-.2635	-.835	.411	.002	583.928
	FOUNDING	.541	.780	.153	.694	.494	.351	2.850
	PCT65	35.718	48.530	3.279	.736	.468	.001	1163.057
	BUDGET	.000	.000	2.065	1.549	.133	.010	104.128
	SSBEN98	-.058	.076	-.574	-.764	.451	.030	33.010
	POLVOTE	-.047	.979	-.009	-.048	.962	.460	2.174
	PRES	-4.624	5.664	-.166	-.816	.421	.413	2.424
	MEDIA	-.027	.043	-.109	-.627	.536	.561	1.782
	YEAR2	-5.023	10.330	-.140	-.486	.631	.207	4.827
	AARP	-1.54E-06	.000	-1.442	-.964	.343	.008	131.051

a. Dependent Variable: HEARING

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.753 <sup>a</sup>	.567	.428	10.118

a. Predictors: (Constant), YEAR2, %aarp, %polvote, %media, %pct65, %budget, %ssben98, %founding, %cumdens

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	37.689	5.739		6.567	.000		
	%aarp	-.015	.011	-.207	-1.413	.169	.723	1.383
	%cumdens	-.805	.635	-.318	-1.267	.215	.246	4.070
	%founding	.024	.019	.264	1.283	.210	.366	2.734
	%pct65	-.922	5.467	-.035	-.169	.867	.362	2.764
	%budget	-.794	.277	-.427	-2.863	.008	.695	1.438
	%ssben98	-.678	.447	-.224	-1.516	.141	.709	1.411
	%polvote	-.067	.134	-.065	-.501	.620	.924	1.082
	%media	.020	.028	.099	.725	.475	.829	1.207
	YEAR2	10.832	5.743	.299	1.886	.070	.614	1.628

a. Dependent Variable: HEARING

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.829 <sup>a</sup>	.686	.586	6.54374

a. Predictors: (Constant), YEAR2, %aarp, %polvote, %media, %pct65, %budget, %ssben98, %founding, %cumdens

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	32.818	3.712		8.841	.000		
	%aarp	-.008	.007	-.148	-1.188	.245	.723	1.383
	%cumdens	-.965	.411	-.501	-2.347	.026	.246	4.070
	%founding	.025	.012	.353	2.015	.054	.366	2.734
	%pct65	1.221	3.536	.061	.345	.732	.362	2.764
	%budget	-.455	.179	-.322	-2.534	.017	.695	1.438
	%ssben98	-.120	.289	-.052	-.415	.681	.709	1.411
	%polvote	-.108	.087	-.137	-1.240	.225	.924	1.082
	%media	.007	.018	.044	.375	.710	.829	1.207
	YEAR2	11.324	3.714	.412	3.048	.005	.614	1.628

a. Dependent Variable: AVGHEAR

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.996 <sup>a</sup>	.993	.990	1309586.216

a. Predictors: (Constant), HEARING, FOUNDING, MEDIA, PRES, POLVOTE, YEAR2, CUMDENS, SSBEN98, BUDGET, PCT65

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-2.1E+08	2.8E+07		-7.411	.000		
	CUMDENS	-273414	51451.401	-1.490	-5.314	.000	.003	297.961
	FOUNDING	88684.224	89909.543	.027	.986	.332	.357	2.802
	PCT65	2.5E+07	3259413	2.426	7.581	.000	.003	388.361
	BUDGET	23.818	9.744	.383	2.444	.021	.011	93.168
	SSBEN98	-24710.2	7658.793	-.260	-3.226	.003	.041	24.566
	POLVOTE	-110902	111792.8	-.023	-.992	.330	.476	2.101
	PRES	-2001731	548294.4	-.077	-3.651	.001	.595	1.681
	MEDIA	1082.054	5008.923	.005	.216	.831	.554	1.804
	YEAR2	-4178242	911091.9	-.124	-4.586	.000	.360	2.780
	HEARING	-20835.3	21609.261	-.022	-.964	.343	.494	2.026

a. Dependent Variable: AARP

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.887 <sup>a</sup>	.787	.719	6920768.327

a. Predictors: (Constant), YEAR2, %aarp, %polvote, %media, %pct65, %budget, %ssben98, %founding, %cumdens

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.2E+07	3925712		5.601	.000		
	%aarp	-10120.4	7499.597	-.138	-1.349	.188	.723	1.383
	%cumdens	-1080760	434657.4	-.437	-2.486	.019	.246	4.070
	%founding	7927.910	13027.258	.088	.609	.548	.366	2.734
	%pct65	-4834259	3739760	-.187	-1.293	.207	.362	2.764
	%budget	-765342	189739.4	-.422	-4.034	.000	.695	1.438
	%ssben98	-559159	305712.0	-.189	-1.829	.078	.709	1.411
	%polvote	18825.057	91859.527	.019	.205	.839	.924	1.082
	%media	-26663.7	19332.033	-.132	-1.379	.179	.829	1.207
	YEAR2	1.2E+07	3928513	.352	3.162	.004	.614	1.628

a. Dependent Variable: AARP

# Findings

- Independent and dependent variables are highly correlated. All trends increased over time.
- In most cases it appears that congressional attention preceded growth in other areas. However, from the 1947-present data, it seems that models fit better for predicting AARP membership than for hearings. (This is likely a feature of the data, rather than an actual finding).
- Congress knows that its actions are being carefully monitored. Some of the effects of interest groups may not even be empirically detectable.
- Case studies show that congressional activity is directly affected by interest groups.

# Case Study: AARP vs. Reagan

- AARP founded in 1947 as retired teachers association.
- 1958 expanded benefits to all occupations
- Presently has about 1,200 staff members at Washington headquarters, and 3,600 state and local groups.
- In 1984 AARP received \$86 million in federal grants to run job training programs for seniors.
- Although it presents its image as simply an organization that provides social programs and services to seniors, it has a strong and effective lobbying voice in Washington.





# AARP vs. Reagan

- AARP provides “non-partisan” information to seniors via bulletins that place an emphasis on how representatives will handle senior-related issues.
- Congressional representatives are aware of the power AARP has to influence senior voters.
- AARP has strong recruiting processes. These ensure that AARP always has an enormous membership base, despite high turnover.
- Studies show that members of AARP are more likely to contact elected officials about social security (Citizens Participation Study).



# AARP vs. Reagan, May 1981

- Pronounced unemployment and high inflation.
- Reagan administration proposed cutting benefits for early retirees and reducing benefit growths for future retirees.
- A coalition of 125 interest groups, led by AARP, formed Save our Social Security (SOS) to fight the cuts.
- Extreme lobbying and political pressure, focusing on how elderly constituents would respond.
- The groups also mobilized their participants, and there was a huge surge in letter-writing to Congress during that time.
- Both houses of Congress passed resolutions that denounced the Reagan administration's proposals



# Conclusions

- Growing pessimism about the future of social security and other retirement programs.
- This research finds wide support for these programs among both seniors and non-seniors.
- Political influence of senior rights movement and the mobilization of the elderly make it unlikely that any reforms to social security will drastically harm the quality of life that most seniors presently enjoy.
- Not all aspects of aging are as “rosy” as they sound. Healthcare is a particularly troubling issue that many seniors struggle with.



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