

## **WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CULTURE?**

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## WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CULTURE?

The first thing you have to know about Art is to absolutely, positively disregard everything the Art Experts have to say.

Like Experts in any field, they talk in dense jargon (“visionary transcendence,” “unity of tremendous exaltation”) and they see things in the Art that you and I will not see and will not understand....

I prefer Art that captures things as they are in life. The closer to life, the better the Art.

I am fully aware that by preference, Polaroid is a great artist.

I can live with that....

Stu Bykofsky, *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 30, 1996  
(writing about the Cezanne exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art summer, 1996)

Is this the voice of the American public on the arts? Is this a reflection of public opinion about culture? The “Art Experts” that Stu Bykofsky refers to above are art critics and art historians, not necessarily policy makers -- and they probably do not hold him in high regard either. One tends to think of them as the “cultural elite” -- a relatively small group of people who decide what is “high culture” and what is “low culture”; what performances and works of art have merit and which do not; what is uplifting, moving or transcendent, and what is commonplace and ordinary.

“Policy experts” are a different elite group, and in a democracy they must care about what people think -- even on the subject of arts and cultural policy. In a democracy one looks for a correspondence between what the citizens want -- often as voiced in public opinion -- and the decisions of policy-makers. There are many questions that follow from this fundamental concern: Do we care what all members of the public think or just some people? Are elites always better able than the masses to judge what good policy is? Should policy be decided by those who are most involved with and interested in an issue? If we can reach a consensus on “which public,” can we discern what it is that this public wants, and whether or not their preferences can be responded to? *If* there are clear preferences which can be realized in the policy arena, *then* we can determine whether or not policy makers (particularly those who are elected, but others as well) respond to those preferences.

A basic question which this paper begins to address is whether or not the area of arts and culture policy is like most other policy areas with respect to the role of public opinion, or is it different in some significant way? The answer, not surprisingly, is “that depends”; in many ways, there is no reason to think of cultural policy as necessarily being unique with respect to either process or product. In this policy arena as with most others, there are interest(ed) groups, lawmakers, procedures to follow, authorizations to be enacted, appropriations to be made, benefits to be awarded, and some oversight or form of regulation of which all must be aware. On the other hand, cultural politics can become a very different sort of policy arena when we consider the relationship between the mass public, influential elites, and decision-makers. In general, it seems safe to assume that policy makers, elites, and the masses (at least those who are interested in the policy discussion) share assumptions about the parameters, terms, etc. of the policy discussion. When discussing some areas of cultural politics and policy, it is not always clear that this is the case.

It is popular to decry the lack of cultural and artistic sophistication in the American public, and to go on to argue that decisions about the arts should be left to the experts. But this is hardly the only policy arena where this is the case. Imagine “The first thing you have to know about Space Exploration (or National Defense or Health Care) is to absolutely, positively disregard everything the Experts have to say.” While Bykofsky’s column is intended to be humorous, the implicit suggestion that the average person on the street thinks the “arts experts” can and should be ignored has a certain ring of truth to it -- a sentiment that is not found in other policy areas.

People concerned with politics and policy would reject the possibility that policy questions should be decided by people who lack the proper background<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, we know how important the voice of the mass public can be in most, if not all, policy areas. We tend to trust the experts, and we want policy makers to go to the experts when formulating policy options and making choices. Then we, the public, hold the policy-makers accountable. Public opinion may serve to define the parameters within which policy-makers can work, may highlight the resonance of specific issues, or may simply indicate a satisfaction with the status quo. In any case, policy makers need to be aware of the public sentiment on any set of issues -- what opinions are held by the masses, as well as how strong, consistent, and stable these opinions are.

While different theories of democracy (e.g. pluralist, elite-centered, participatory) argue for different roles for the mass public, all assume that there *is* a role for the public in the policy arena, even if it is only to maintain an electoral check on policy makers. As has been noted by Page and Shapiro (1993), “Americans’ collective policy preferences are real, knowable, differentiated, patterned, and coherent.” (383) We can discern what “the people” think about

policy issues. When there are notable shifts in opinion, we can expect that policy makers will be responsive to their constituents and policy will shift accordingly.

Page and Shapiro do not discuss the arts and cultural policy, but they do discuss a variety of other “social issues.” Because social issues are often controversial “hot button” issues (e.g. abortion, the death penalty), they note that one is more likely to see sharp opinion shifts in these areas, particularly as some event or political actor brings an issue onto the center stage, raising public awareness of and interest in the issue. Some of the central issues of arts policy, such as the debate regarding public funding for controversial art, are likely to fall into the same camp. Other arts issues, such as the role of the arts in public education, are much less controversial, and one would expect to see a fair degree of stability in public opinion on such issues. Below, we explore the trends (to the extent that they can be measured) in public opinion data on several of the key issues in the area of arts policy. We are interested in seeing the extent to which public opinion on the central issues of arts policy can be said to be stable and reliable. Put another way, we are curious as to whether or not the American public has a discernible and comprehensible collective opinion about the role of the arts in America. Are their policy preferences with respect to the arts and culture “real, knowable, differentiated, patterned, and coherent”? Then, if there are clear shifts in public opinion, we would expect to see accompanying public policy shifts.

We do not expect that the public takes an active role in the making of policy. Three options for the role of the public emerge from democratic theory. In a majoritarian vision of democracy, policy decisions should reflect the wishes of the majority, presumably as voiced through public opinion polls or measured in some less specific way, and channeled to elected representatives. In a pluralist model, policy decisions reflect the competition among groups for benefits; one does not expect that the entire public is interested in or attentive to most policy discussions. Finally, in an elite politics model, policy decisions are left to a small group of individuals who generally share the same values and preferences. An examination of public opinion, with the expectation that there should be links to policy, assumes either the first or second vision of democracy. Policy either reflects majoritarian preferences or is a question of which groups were most organized and influential in the political process.<sup>2</sup>

## **PUBLIC POLICY AND THE ARTS: THE QUESTION OF PUBLIC PURPOSE**

In the United States, two issues have remained central in the national arts policy arena: the place of the arts in education and the need or desire for a national arts program and/ or agency.<sup>3</sup> Tied to the latter is the question of national funding for the arts.<sup>4</sup> There are questions that should be prior to these, questions closely tied to the question of whether there should be a national arts agency or program: “What is the role of the arts in America?” “Is there an

American culture?” and then “To what extent are the preservation and promotion of such things a public concern?” To be sure, much has been written about the benefits of the arts to the proper functioning of a democracy (e.g. see Barber, 1996; Mulcahy and Wyszomirski, 1995). However, without clarification of the public role of the arts in America, it is not clear why this is a public policy concern rather than strictly a concern for the private market and/ or for the non-profit sector.

Economists speak of “public goods” as those goods and services which “cannot be provided through the price system because there is no way to exclude citizens from consuming the goods whether they pay for them or not.” In addition, there are some goods which “can be enjoyed by one person without depriving others of the same enjoyment.... Such goods are consumed collectively or jointly, and it is inefficient to price them in a market. They tend to be indivisible; thus they frequently cannot be split into pieces and be bought and sold in a market.” (Mansfield 68) To the extent that a good or a benefit is assumed to be public, we generally expect that the government will provide for it. For example, we assume that a national defense must be provided for all equally. Some goods such as transportation infrastructure or clean water and air are clearly indivisible and are also considered by most Americans to be things that government should ensure for all citizens. Some goods are less clearly defined: while an education may be efficiently provided on a private basis, an educated citizenry and workforce are often seen as public goods. Other goods, such as health insurance and a post-secondary education, are examples of goods that many people assume are best left to the private sector while others believe belong in the public sector.

While “culture” in the sense of a shared history, language, values, etc. is something that we all share, “culture” as those things which signify taste, sophistication, exposure to the arts, etc. is a different story. There is no consensus about what kind of “good” the arts are, nor has there been a consensus about what it is about the arts that serves a public purpose. Furthermore, it is not always clear which goods are considered to be “cultural” or “artistic” and which goods lie outside a discussion of American culture and arts. For example, in both the Surveys of Public Participation and the Arts and the Americans and the Arts studies<sup>5</sup>, respondents were asked about the “arts” activities in which they engage. For this purpose, participating in “the Arts” includes listening to a symphony or to a jazz combo, going to a movie (“Hamlet” or “Rambo”?), or reading a book (“classics” or Harlequin romances?), among other things.

While there is little if any survey data on what the mass public sees at the place of the arts and culture in American public life, the parameters for the discussion of the public purpose(s) of the arts are being defined -- or perhaps redefined. The participants at the recent American Assembly conference on the future of arts policy<sup>6</sup> came together to discuss what “public purposes” are served and ought to be served by the arts. Wyszomirski (1997) is more detailed

in her discussion of public purposes and the arts, and takes the question further to explore the policy strategies and programs that are likely to accompany various purposes. Both the American Assembly participants and Wyszomirski draw on the U.S. Constitution, specifically the Preamble, to explore the question of what interests can be assumed to be “public” -- shared by all citizens and/ or benefitting all citizens. The Preamble is argued to express a consensus that all Americans hope for a more perfect Union, Justice, domestic tranquility; that the general welfare be preserved; that a common defense be provided; and that we and our Posterity enjoy the blessings of liberty (see particularly Wyszomirski pp. 2-3, and the American Assembly Final Report, p. 12 on this point). This sounds straightforward enough, but where the arts and culture belong is not clear, nor is it clear to what extent policy prescriptions follow. <sup>7</sup>

As noted by both Wyszomirski and the American Assembly participants, there is a tension between public and private purposes. While we recognize that policy benefits are granted on both bases, in most cases, the legitimacy of a private benefit (e.g. tax relief for specific groups, protectionist trade policy) is predicated on the assumption of a public benefit (e.g. a more robust economy). This discussion assumes that “the arts” are a policy area where this is granted at a basic level; i.e. it is assumed that there is, at the minimum, the possibility of a public role for the arts and for cultural goods, that we can discern what these public purposes are at a given, and then that we can discuss the intersection of public and private purposes. Figure 1 loosely outlines the notions of the public purposes of the arts as explained by Wyszomirski and as appear in the Final Report from the American Assembly:

**Figure 1**  
**PUBLIC PURPOSES AND THE ARTS**

<b>Constitution/Preamble <sup>8</sup></b>	<b>Wyszomirski</b>	<b>American Assembly</b>
To Form a More Perfect Union	Cultivating Democracy	The arts help define what it is to be an American: By building a sense of national identity.... By reinforcing the reality of American pluralism.... By advancing democracy....
(To Establish Justice)		
To Ensure Domestic Tranquility	Fostering Community	The arts form an educated and aware citizenry: By promoting understanding.... By raising questions about our experiences and our values....
To Provide for the Common Defense	Furthering the Quest for Security	
To Promote the General Welfare	Contributing to Prosperity	The arts contribute to economic growth and the quality of life: By making communities more livable and prosperous.... By increasing the nation’s prosperity....
To Secure the Blessings of Liberty for Ourselves and Our Posterity	Improving the Quality and Condition of Life	The arts enhance individual freedom, spirit, and potential: By encouraging individual growth.... By providing release, relaxation, repose -- entertainment....

A quick review of the polling that has been done about the arts shows that it is difficult to categorize the questions or to fit them into the discussion of “public purposes” and / or policy goals. (See, for example, the review of survey questions in Filicko (1996).) There are questions which suggest what it means to be an American (or what in other cultures can be contrasted with American culture), but it is difficult to assess notions of democracy, pluralism, etc. There are other studies of patriotism and national identity (Sullivan et al. 19??), but it is not clear how this compares to the current discussion of culture. As will be discussed below, there are questions which deal with the role of the arts in both creating a sense of community and in educating good citizens, but as will become clear, the link between a broad notion of public purpose and a specific policy can not always be seen in survey responses. There are some questions that deal with the perception that the arts improve a community in such a way that attracts business and improves the economic well-being of all. Finally there are questions that try to measure how well the arts improve the quality of life in general, but there are problems with trying to measure opinions on this question with survey data. It is difficult to phrase a survey question in a way that allows a respondent to answer in the negative, i.e. that the arts are not beneficial.

Open-ended questions about what “arts” and “culture” mean to respondents begin to get at these notions, albeit tangentially. (See Figure 2). Furthermore, where there are a number of the questions which are directed at general ideas -- such as the benefit of arts to a community, these questions do not tend to include implicit or definable public purposes or policy goals. (All of these questions are discussed in more detail below.)

**Figure 2**  
**Sample Survey Questions: Definitions**

<p>In a 1973 study conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the Associated Councils of the Arts and Philip Morris, the following question was asked of a national (aged 16 and older) sample of 3005 adults (aged 16 older) in personal interviews:</p> <p>What does the word 'cultural' mean to you? Anything else?</p> <p>As reported in <i>Americans and the Arts</i>, the responses offered by the respondents were:</p>	
<p>The arts (music, theatre, dance, visual arts, museums, historical sites, etc.)... 37%</p> <p>Education, learning... 19%</p> <p>Life style, way people live, behavior ... 16%</p> <p>Refinement, finer things, anything uplifting... 14%</p> <p>Historical background of people: customs and traditions... 12%</p> <p>Progress, development... 9%</p> <p>Making things beautiful... 8%</p> <p>Things people enjoy doing: way they spend their time... 5%</p>	<p>Environment, beauties of nature... 4%</p> <p>Any creativity used in work, home: talents... 4%</p> <p>Good values: whatever is good in society ... 4%</p> <p>Understanding the sciences... 2%</p> <p>Cultivation: farming: food and cooking... 2%</p> <p>Any other answer... 6%</p> <p>Don't know/Nothing ... 14%</p> <p>(Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses)</p>
<p>In 1990, Research and Forecasts asked the following for the People for the American Way Action Fund, as part of a study on <i>Federal Support for the Arts</i>:</p> <p>To start, when I mention the word 'arts' what comes to mind. Probe: What do you consider or include in the arts? Anything else?...</p> <p>In telephone interviews of 1200 national adults, the responses were:</p>	
<p>Visual Arts... 81%</p> <p>Performing Arts ...72%</p> <p>Museums/ Art galleries...17%</p> <p>Movies .... 6%</p> <p>Architecture... 2%</p> <p>T.V. (Television/ Radio) ...2%</p> <p>Scenery/ Foliage ... 1%</p>	<p>Self-Expression/ Creativity ... 1%</p> <p>Beauty/ Culture ... 1%</p> <p>Sports .... 1%</p> <p>All other ... 1%</p> <p>Nothing/ None .... 2%</p> <p>Don't Know/ No Answer 1%</p> <p>(Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses.)</p>

Adapted from Filicko (1996)

We need to assess both how Americans think about the public purposes of the Arts and the level of public support for the specific policy initiatives that follow from our shared sense of public purposes. For example, Wyszomirski describes the policy strategies and programs that may follow from a desire for prosperity. As she explains it, the public purpose of Prosperity is predicated on core values such as individualism, efficiency, creativity, and excellence. Policy goals and strategies which follow are economic utility, (desire to avoid) market failure, access and choice (in the marketplace), and individual opportunity. Programs which follow from the policy strategies include the licensing of access to public goods (e.g. airwaves) -- under economic utility; provision of aid to nonprofit organizations -- under market failure; ensuring quality and engaging in promotional activities -- under access and choice; and copyright protections -- under individual opportunity.

This description of the relationship between core values, public purposes, and policy strategies highlights the problem with the current state of public opinion data on the arts and culture. While it is probably safe to assume that there is support for “core values” it is not clear which values are prioritized at any time. Furthermore, this would be difficult to measure. What could be measured is the level of knowledge and the degree of support for the public purposes and policy strategies at a given time. This is where the central questions about public opinion and public policy arise. To what extent do the public purposes as voiced by experts and elites resonate with the public? To what extent are the specific policies supported by the public? Are we content with the status quo or do we desire change? Public support for the specific policies must be measured, as well as support for the underlying conceptualization of public purposes.

Before moving on to a discussion of the data on public opinion on the arts, it is probably important to emphasize again that “public purpose” explicitly assumes that there is a potential for all citizens to benefit. If the benefits of an arts policy or a broader cultural policy are seen to be narrow -- just falling on artists as a profession or on museums and performing arts companies as institutions then these groups may be seen as simply one more set of professional interests which comes to the public coffers for a handout. While there are certainly plenty of other professions which do this, without a notion of public purpose there is no justification for treating arts institutions and arts professionals any differently than the government treats the for profit transportation industry or the manufacturing industries or any other group.

## **PUBLIC OPINION ON THE ARTS AND CULTURE**

### **The “Americans and the Arts” series**

Much of the trend data on the arts comes from a series of studies done by Louis Harris and his associates known as “The Americans and the Arts” series. The first study is from data collected in 1973 (published in 1975); the fifth and most recent is from 1992.<sup>1</sup> Harris conducted national surveys on questions having to do with attendance and participation in the arts, the place of arts in education, and support for a national arts program and funding for the same, among other things. Across the two decades, there were important shifts in American social life, and questions were asked to gauge the impact of economic recessions, the advance of technology and telecommunications, and the decline of leisure time on Americans’ attitudes about the arts and their participation in the arts.

The data from the “Americans and the Arts” series show a great deal of stability over the past several decades. Support for arts classes in the public schools is consistently high, and majorities consistently believe that such courses should be part of the regular curriculum and

funded as such. People show consistent patterns in their attendance at arts events, though these vary across standard demographic variables and across the different arts disciplines. Majorities consistently say they would like to have more opportunities to experience the arts in their communities, and they would like their children to be able to experience the arts. The arts are consistently seen as important to the quality of life in a community as well as in the communities' ability to attract business. Majorities frequently support raising taxes to pay for the arts.

All of the reports from this series note that the public's support for federal financing of the arts is not particularly strong, but this is assumed to be because the public misunderstands how the arts are financed. The implicit -- at times explicit, but never detailed -- argument is that the public would support federal financing for the arts if they only knew better. Questions are asked to determine where people think the different arts disciplines receive most of their funding. To the extent that more people believe institutions to be publicly funded (e.g. libraries are assumed to be, performing arts are not), a greater proportion of the public is willing to support continued funding. To the extent that more people believe the arts to be profit-making, fewer people are likely to support public funding for the arts. Also, there is consistently more support for state and local funding of the arts than for federal funding.

This relates to the discussion of public goods above. Because "the arts" covers a wide array of activities, it can be difficult to tailor a question to assess what people know and feel about the arts. Nevertheless, it seems implicit in the Harris findings that if people are asked to pay admission or ticket prices, they are less likely to see a need for more of their money (in the form of tax dollars) to go to supporting those institutions. If some people have more access to the arts because they have more money (and can afford symphony or ballet tickets, for example) then it is difficult to argue that those organizations are providing a public benefit. Of course, to the extent that those organizations are seen to attract business a community, they can be argued to provide an indirect benefit for all members of the community.

Some of the most interesting questions in the recent studies are on the advances in telecommunications and technology (especially VCRs, Cable, and now the World Wide Web) that have made the arts more accessible in many ways but which have served as a possible deterrent to support for live performances. At this point, the studies merely note the rise in the use of these; it is difficult to gauge their impact yet.

The questions that might prove to be most helpful in some ways are also the most troubling. Beginning with the 1976 report, the studies ask about attitudes on the arts -- things such as how beneficial the arts are seen to be to the community, how hardworking artists are believed to be and how much they deserve benefits similar to other professions, and how well the National Endowment for the Arts performs its role. These questions begin to get at the issue of

what role the arts should have in our public life. Unfortunately, there are some problems with question wording. Both the questions on artists and the questions on the NEA begin with statements that define “professional artists” and the National Endowment for Arts in glowing terms, and then go on to ask about support for them. The attitudinal questions often have a tendency to establish a choice where the respondent can either support the “pro-arts” position or define him or herself to be an idiot or a cretin.<sup>2</sup>

### **Trends in Public Opinion on the Arts**

Our review of the survey questions (see Filicko, 1996)<sup>3</sup> leads us to focus on the three following general questions as central to gauging public support on arts policy:

#### *1) What is the role of the arts in education?*

More specifically, this is generally taken to mean whether or not there is support for art(s) classes in the public school curriculum, particularly though not exclusively in the primary grades. There are follow-up questions which ask whether such courses should be funded as part of the regular curriculum or should be treated separately. In addition there are related questions about the benefits of the arts to children.

The data (see Figure 3) show that for many disciplines, majorities support having classes as part of the regular curriculum. Where it drops -- between 1987 and 1992, the shift in public opinion is towards having classes taught after school and not for credit. This could be taken to mean one of two things: 1) in a budget, time, or resource crunch, arts classes are considered by many -- though not a majority -- to be expendable; or 2) even in a budget, resource, or time crunch, the arts are considered necessary, and opportunities for students must be made available in some form. (Additional questions appear Appendix A.)

#### *2) Is there support for a national arts program/ policy?*

This question has been asked in different, not particularly comparable ways throughout the past few decades. In the early 60s, survey respondents were asked if there should be national awards for artistic merit. In more recent years support for the National Endowment for the Arts and/ or its mission has been gauged. (See Figure 4.) Two points about the survey questions shown in Figure 4 with respect to the role of government should be noted. In the first question, respondents are asked to think about programs for artists that exist in other countries which do not exist in the United States. While the point of the question is clearly to assess whether or not there should be (U.S.) government involvement in such programs, respondents are not asked to respond to “government” contributions per se, but rather about “government/ private programs” - - a significant difference. The second point can be seen in the second question. Among the possible actors which might be given responsibility for achieving the goal of “promoting culture

through museums and concerts” are “community leaders” and “government,” among others. While it is certainly true that there are many kinds of community leaders -- religious, business, etc. -- certainly elected and appointed political leaders, serving in government, might be considered to be community leaders. There is probably an important difference in the minds of the public between the two terms, one which it would serve both groups to clarify.

**Figure 3**  
**Sample Survey Questions: The Arts in Education**

<i>Support for Specific Arts Curriculum</i>				
Some people think that classes in the arts for children should be taught in public schools, just like math or science or English. Other people think that classes like those should be given, but only after school or as a noncredit activity, and still others don't think they should be given at all. In your opinion, should the public schools in this area teach courses in... [INSERT ITEM]...for credit, should it be an after-school or noncredit course, or should it not be offered at all?				
Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates				
Drawing, painting or sculpture				
	1980	1987	1992	
	75	78	72	Teach for credit
	22	19	24	After school non-credit
	2	2	3	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
Acting				
	1980	1987	1992	
	59	61	n/a	Teach for credit
	32	33		After school non-credit
	7	4		Not offered at all
	2	1		Not sure
	100	100	100	
Playing a musical instrument				
	1980	1987	1992	
	78	81	74	Teach for credit
	19	16	24	After school non-credit
	2	1	1	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
Voice or singing				
	1980	1987	1992	
	75	75	65	Teach for credit
	22	21	32	After school non-credit
	2	2	2	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	

3) *Should federal tax dollars be spent on the arts?*

This is clearly tied to the previous question, but must be looked at separately. It is fairly easy to support the mission of a national arts agency. Support may lessen if the specific agency has become controversial. When the support sought is financial and federal dollars must be rationed, support may be that more difficult. Figure 5 shows two ways in which this has been asked.

**Figure 4**  
**Sample Survey Questions: Support for Arts Policy**

<b>Support for National Arts Policy</b>		
Other countries in the western world, such as Canada, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, and others all have programs to help individual artists develop. Their governments and private contributors set up special funds that sometimes buy the works of developing artists, sometimes give artists direct grants of money, and sometimes set up professional training facilities for artists. In the U.S., almost no such facilities or programs exist. Do you think there should be such programs for individual artists in the country or not?		
Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates		
Research Sponsor: Philip Morris Companies		
1987	1992	
65	70	Should be such government/private programs
31	26	Should not be such programs
4	4	Not sure
100	100	
<b>Who Should Be Supporting the Arts</b>		
(The options to the questions vary across time, but one thing remains constant: Respondents seem to favor the most "local" level response that is offered in the question. Community groups are favored over business; Business is favored over government; local and state governments are favored over the federal government. One consistent exception is that community groups are favored over individuals.)		
MARCH 16-18, 1995		
Now I'm going to read a list of goals. For each one, please tell me which of the following groups you think has the greatest responsibility for achieving that goal--government, businesses, community leaders, or individuals?)...		
...Promoting culture through museums and concerts		
Survey Organization: Hart And Teeter Research Companies		
Research Sponsor: The Council for Excellence in Government		
Government	15%	
Businesses	11	
Community leaders	44	
Individuals	19	
All/Combination (vol.)	6	
Not sure	5	
	100%	

### ***Funding for the Arts***

Now I'd like to ask about some specific federal government programs. Again, for each, please tell me whether you feel spending for that program should be increased, decreased or left about the same.)...Aid to arts and music...  
(If Increase/Decrease, probe:) Is that increased/decreased a great deal or somewhat?

Survey Organization: ABC News/Washington Post

1981	1986	1989	
4	4	7	Increase great deal
9	10	11	Increase somewhat
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>41</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>54</b>	Left about the same
22	14	15	Decrease somewhat
21	18	12	Decrease great deal
<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	
2	2	1	No opinion
<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please indicate whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say much more, it might require a tax increase to pay for it.)  
... Culture and the arts

Survey Organization: National Opinion Research Center

1985	1990	1996	
4	2	4	Spend much more
10	10	11	Spend more
<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	
<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>37</b>	Spend same as now
24	21	27	Spend less
15	16	17	Spend much less
<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>44</b>	
7	8	4	No opinion
<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

### **Culture?**

A discussion of public opinion on arts and culture gets confusing particularly at the point where the two terms overlap. In survey data and public opinion studies, respondents are not assumed to be extrapolating on their own about what terms might mean. Two points follow from this. First, whether we are talking about partisanship or policy, researchers generally assume that there is some consensus about the terms being used in the questions, that this consensus about

the meanings of terms holds across the subject population, and then that the respondents' answers can be assumed to be comparable. Second, once this assumption is in place, researchers can not assume that the terms mean anything else. With respect to the arts and culture, this gets a bit tricky. Policy makers and politicians, among others, speak of the two as part and parcel of the same thing. Nevertheless, if a respondent is asked something about culture, it can *not* be assumed that he or she is giving an answer about art, or vice versa.

This becomes clearer when one examines the small amount of data that is available about the public's understanding of these terms. As noted above, pollsters have asked what the public understands by "arts" and by "culture." (See Figure 2 above.) Unfortunately, both questions below were asked only once, so we have no way of knowing if these are fairly stable opinions or what the current state of public opinion is on these questions.

As noted by Filicko (1996),

Together, these two questions can be read in a number of ways. One of the first things to note is that there seems to be a consensus on what "arts" means; most Americans understand "arts" to mean the visual and performing arts. There is no similar consensus on what "culture" is, or at least there was not one in 1973. Furthermore, while 37% of those surveyed mentioned "the arts" as being what they understood by "cultural," only 1% of those surveyed think of culture when asked about "arts."

... [I]t is interesting to note what is and is not included in our understandings of these terms. Literature and poetry are *not* considered by many to be included in the arts. While it may be no surprise (and comforting to some) that television and the movies are not considered by many to be in the arts, it may seem odd to many involved in the arts that self-expression and creativity only come to mind for 1% of the respondents surveyed. In addition to whatever else this might say about American understanding of the arts, it suggests that if advocates for more freedom of expression wish to make arguments about public support for their cause, they must make a link between self-expression and the arts much more explicit. ...[T]he understanding of what "cultural" means covers a wide range of ideas, everything from music and theater and the historical background of people to the environment and farming, food, and cooking. (230)

A further exploration of some of the questions that have been asked reveals more about how we understand the concept of "culture."<sup>1</sup> Survey questions about "culture" include a wide array of subjects. There are, of course, questions asked about cultural life and the arts that fall into the same general discussion as those above. There are also questions asking about American culture and/or the culture of another country (notably Russia, China, and Japan) which ask respondents if they think that cultural exchange programs are a good idea, if they think that two cultures are too different for countries to get along, and whether they like or dislike aspects of

another country's culture. Tied to these are questions which ask what about American culture makes it different, unique, or special in some way.

There are two types of questions which seem to be particularly tied to current debates in American politics, though the ideas behind them may always be present in discussions of culture. First are questions about subcultures, ethnic groups, immigrant groups and multiculturalism. Respondents are asked whether some specific people (e.g. immigrants, different ethnic groups) should be encouraged to focus on their own heritage or to become more a part of the dominant culture. A second set of questions are about the role of popular culture in influencing attitudes and behaviors with respect to sex and violence, particularly in teens.

A recent study by Stevens (1997) provides a useful counterpoint to the national survey data. For an evaluation of arts participation in Indiana, Stevens conducted focus groups, followed by telephone interviews. The discussion of what is understood by her respondents as "culture" and how this contrast with "art" is instructive. As she reports:

- \_ "Culture," as defined through these participants, is an experience, something different and out of the norm.
- \_ Entertainment is perceived as more "fun" than the arts (and you don't have to dress up).
- \_ The arts are work, but that's not necessarily bad -- it just requires a willingness to be mentally engaged. (14)

**Figure 6**  
**Sample Survey Questions: American Cultures**

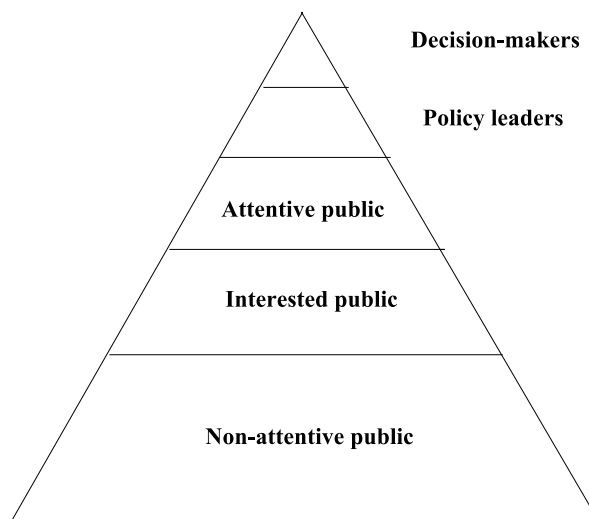
<b>Cultural Comparisons</b>	
In 1974 (and again in 1977), Roper asked 1984 adults in personal interviews:	
Here are some things that people have said are differences between us and other nations. And according to some, some of these are why the United States has become such a great nation. Would you call off each of the things, if any, you think have been the major causes of United States greatness?	
The 1974 responses were:	
Our constitution and form of government	75
Its natural resources	68
Our system of public education for all citizens	63
Our free enterprise system	60
Hard work	55
Our pioneer heritage, the kind of people we came from	54
It's a melting pot, with people from different cultures	49
The moral principles of its people, religious beliefs	42
Availability of credit ... for the average person	41
It's a new society, with new ideas, not set in 'established' ways	28
Lack of tariff boundaries between states	27
Lack of 'caste' or class system	22
Separation from, lack of involvement with neighboring countries -- their policies, intrigues, wars, etc	9
None	1
Don't know	4
Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses.	
<b>Subcultures</b>	
Does the increasing diversity that immigrants bring to this country mostly improve American culture or mostly threaten American culture or does it not effect American culture?	
This was asked of 1426 adults asked by the Los Angeles Times in 1995 in telephone interviews.	
Immigrants threaten American culture	39
Improve	28
No effect	25
Not Sure or refused to answer	6
Depends on group (volunteered)	2
A similar question was asked about racial and ethnic groups, but not specifically targeting immigrants:	
Some people say that it is better for America if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct cultures. Others say that it is better if groups change so that they blend into the larger society as in the idea of a melting pot. Which of these positions comes closer to your own opinion: Racial and ethnic groups should maintain their distinct cultures, or groups should change so that they blend into the larger society?	
The question was asked in 1992 by the Center for Political Studies as part of the American National Election Study.	
Group should change and blend into the larger culture	47
Groups should maintain their distinct cultures	34
Neither/ both, etc.	18

Adapted from Filicko (1996).

**PUBLIC OPINION, POLITICS, POLICY... AND THE ARTS:  
EXPLAINING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE ARTS**

This paper began with a comment from a journalist who suggested that “experts” in the arts are not to be trusted. Students of public policy should recognize the dilemma that this creates: policy options are often established and implemented by “the experts.” Jon Miller (1983) refers to Gabriel Almond’s breakdown of the public on foreign policy in his explanation of the role of the public with respect to science policy. (See Figure 7). This model can be applied across many policy arenas. One can assume that a large segment of the public is disinterested, some of the public can be seen as attentive, a smaller portion are actually interested in and engaged with the policy discussion, and the policy decision making happens in a much smaller arena of elites and experts.

**Figure 7  
GABRIEL ALMOND’S “STRATIFIED MODEL OF POLICY FORMATION”**



Source: Jon D. Miller, *The American People and Science Policy*, p 23

The public opinion data suggest that the relationship between the public and the policy makers on arts policy may follow at least two patterns. On the question of the arts and

education, the Almond/ Miller model holds. Most policy decisions are made by experts -- professional arts educators, etc., there are attentive segments of the public who monitor their decisions and the implementation of policy, and for the most part, people are supportive of the general policy and do not concern themselves too much with it.<sup>1</sup> Focus group data (e.g. Stevens, 1997) which may help shed some light on how attitudes vary across groups. More importantly, focus group studies provide a useful model of how one might approach the study of elite attitudes. In addition, it may be possible to use proxies for "elite status" such as education or professional status and to look for elite-mass similarities and differences in this way.

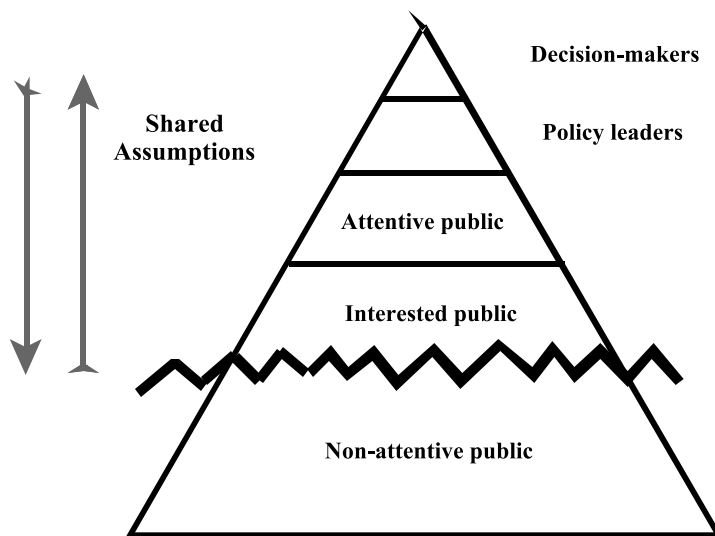
The questions of the desire for a national arts program or agency and how this should be funded is a different story. While there seems to be support for something, the evaluation of the performance of those at the top of the pyramid -- the experts and policy makers -- get mixed reviews. Again though, it is not clear that there is much in the data to support or negate this position; rather, it is that there seems to be ample evidence in the popular press and in the actions of the U.S. Congress to suggest that the legitimacy of the policy leadership is being questioned. Of course if the legitimacy of the policy leadership is questioned on one issue, this would seem likely to undermine its perceived legitimacy in other areas. There are at least two ways to look at this. First -- and perhaps more benignly -- it may be that we simply have several different groups (e.g. advocates for artistic freedom and advocates for the protection or preservation of certain core values) who are competing to redefine the terms of the policy discourse. If this is the case, then we may be in a temporary period of upheaval as a new policy paradigm is established, after which we can expect that the standard dynamic of a primarily disinterested public tacitly supporting the parameters of the policy discussion, with attentive and interested publics monitoring the actions of the experts and policy makers.

The other option is that the linkages between the levels are missing or are being redirected. There may be a sizable majority who remain disinterested, but the suggestion is that this majority may not tacitly support the assumptions of the policy makers. Perhaps even more disheartening, the experts in this arena often do not seem to care. When one moves up the pyramid to the interested and attentive publics, the experts may be seen to have lost their legitimacy -- at least among some of the most active. If this is the case, the policy community has broken down and may not be able to sustain itself -- at least with respect to these kinds of issues.

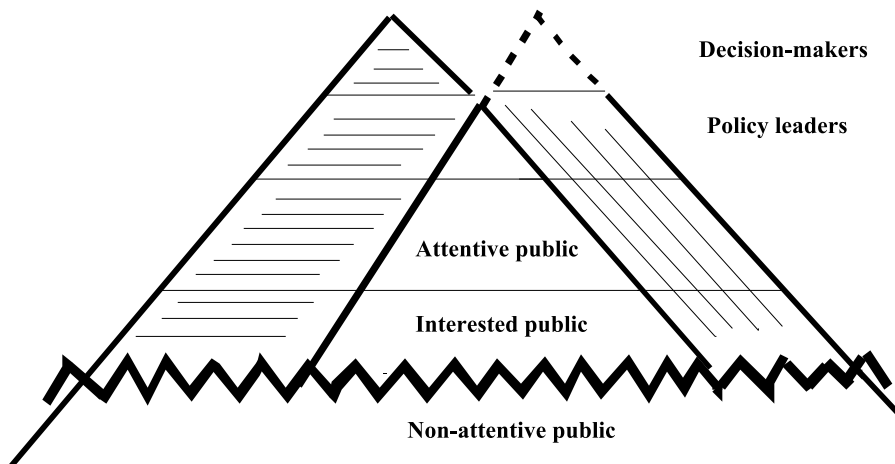
Patterns 1 and 2 (Figures 8 and 9) describes alternative models. In both, a substantial portion of the public falls into the category of the Disinterested. In the first (Figure 8), there are shared assumptions -- about the range of policy goals under consideration, the core values that underlie them, the legitimacy of the political process, and the authority of the experts involved. There very well may be disagreement within the Interested and Attentive Publics or among the

Policy Leaders; the arguments are presented to the decision-makers who evaluate the competing interests, goals, or programs and make their decisions accordingly. Dissension is fine; nothing is likely to violate the core assumptions about what are legitimate political processes and policy goals. In the second (Figure 9), there are two competing sets of assumptions. There is a possibility that the old paradigm (on the left side of the figure) will collapse and be replaced by the priorities (possibly expressed as core values) and assumptions of the competing paradigm. It is possible that neither will survive.

**Figure 8  
Pattern 1**



**Figure 9**  
**Pattern 2**



The possibility of the collapse of an old paradigm does not make arts and cultural policy unique. Paradigm shifts, ideological realignments, external shocks, and/or policy innovations occur all of the time. If we are witnessing a major shift, this policy area could look to the arenas of defense policy in the post-Cold War era, communications in the technological revolution we are experiencing, etc. for models of how to adapt.

## **“... everything the Arts Experts have to say”**

Again, neither the existence of dissension among policy makers nor the possibility of a major paradigm shift in how we think about arts and cultural policy makes this a unique arena. Nevertheless, the Almond/ Miller model does suggest a way in which this policy arena may be most unique. In most policy discussions, a certain amount of legitimacy comes with recognized expertise. Experts may disagree on preferences and even on assumptions, and different schools of thought may develop (as they have in both economic theory and foreign policy). In the arts and culture, expertise is a more difficult thing to assess; beauty, among other things, is in the eye of the beholder, and even “the experts” can not always agree on what quality is. While this is tied to the “culture wars” it is a much more fundamental problem. Questions of culture may be somewhat unique in the policy arena. Maybe we can agree on what it means to be cultured or what American culture is or what ought to be maintained at some basic level (e.g. historical documents, inaugural ball gowns, Archie Bunker’s chair and Judy Garland’s ruby slippers), but how to present American culture is a different question (e.g. the Enola Gay exhibit, the Life on the Plantation exhibit) and what counts as art (paintings by Basquiat, the Wyeths, and/ or Winslow Homer? the Gershwins and/ or Philip Glass? etc.) is always controversial. Policy, at least as it reflects public opinion, needs to reflect the public consensus on either the desired product or the legitimate process. If there can be no consensus, where does that leave the policy-makers?

In the end, we know that citizens are, more often than not, willing to leave policy to the experts; the involvement of an attentive public does not mean controversy or even disagreement, just that there are people who are involved. The political question is “When does the public become involved?” and generally this seems to be when controversy or an event draws attention to the policy. The danger with arts policy is that on the controversial questions, it may be that the experts and decision-makers and majorities of the public operate on very different assumptions or that the public feels that experts are not to be trusted. In such a case, the link between the lower and upper regions of Miller’s pyramid are not there.

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## Appendix A Survey Questions

### *Support for Specific Arts Curriculum*

Some people think that classes in the arts for children should be taught in public schools, just like math or science or English. Other people think that classes like those should be given, but only after school or as a noncredit activity, and still others don't think they should be given at all. In your opinion, should the public schools in this area teach courses in... [INSERT ITEM]...for credit, should it be an after-school or noncredit course, or should it not be offered at all?

Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates

a.	Drawing, painting or sculpture			
	1980	1987	1992	
	75	78	72	Teach for credit
	22	19	24	After school non-credit
	2	2	3	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
b.	Acting			
	1980	1987	1992	
	59	61	n/a	Teach for credit
	32	33		After school non-credit
	7	4		Not offered at all
	2	1		Not sure
	100	100	100	
c.	Photography or filmmaking			
	1980	1987	1992	
	61	62	58	Teach for credit
	31	31	36	After school non-credit
	6	6	5	Not offered at all
	2	2	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
d.	Playing a musical instrument			
	1980	1987	1992	
	78	81	74	Teach for credit
	19	16	24	After school non-credit
	2	1	1	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
e.	Voice or singing			
	1980	1987	1992	
	75	75	65	Teach for credit
	22	21	32	After school non-credit
	2	2	2	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
f.	Music appreciation			
	1980	1987	1992	
	75	76	70	Teach for credit
	20	19	26	After school non-credit

	3	2	3	Not offered at all
	2	2	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
g.	Ballet, modern dance, or movement			
	1980	1987	1992	
	55	55	n/a	Teach for credit
	34	37		After school non-credit
	9	7		Not offered at all
	2	2		Not sure
	100	100	100	
h.	Writing stories or poems			
	1980	1987	1992	
	79	84	80	Teach for credit
	17	13	17	After school non-credit
	3	2	2	Not offered at all
	1	1	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
I.	Art appreciation			
	1980	1987	1992	
	72	74	70	Teach for credit
	23	21	25	After school non-credit
	2	3	4	Not offered at all
	2	2	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	
j.	Art history			
	1980	1987	1992	
	n/a	74	72	Teach for credit
		20	22	After school non-credit
		3	5	Not offered at all
		2	1	Not sure
	100	100	100	

### *Arts Curriculum as a Mandatory High School Requirement*

NOVEMBER 1984-JANUARY 1985

In your opinion, in order to graduate from the high school in your local community should all students be required to take... two years of art, drama, or music?

Survey Organization: Market Opinion Research  
 Research Sponsor: National Institute of Education

Yes	51%
No	47
No opinion	3

FEBRUARY 1992

Do you feel that completion of at least one year of arts courses should be required, as other important subjects are, for a student to graduate from high school and to gain admission in college, or don't you feel that way?

Survey Organization: L.H. Research

Research Sponsor: Philip Morris Companies

Should be required	58%
Don't feel that way	40
Not sure	2

*Importance of Arts Curriculum Compared to Other Subjects*

MARCH-APRIL, 1987

Do you think that in order to have well-rounded students turned out by the school system, it is just as important to have students learn as much about the arts as they do English, foreign language, math, science and social studies, or don't you feel that way?

Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates  
Research Sponsor: Philip Morris Companies

Just as important to learn about arts	67%
Don't feel that way	31
Not sure	2

FEBRUARY, 1992

When you think of what teaching the arts in school can do for young people, do you feel that having arts as part of the regular school curriculum is as important for a child as... [INSERT ITEM] or not?

Learning Math & Science	Learning to Read and Write well	Learning history or geography	
60	53	67	As important
39	46	32	Not as important
1	1	1	Not sure
100	100	100	

*Funding for the Arts*

Now I'd like to ask about some specific federal government programs. Again, for each, please tell me whether you feel spending for that program should be increased, decreased or left about the same.)...Aid to arts and music... (If Increase/Decrease, probe:) Is that increased/decreased a great deal or somewhat?

Survey Organization: ABC News/Washington Post

1981	1986	1989	
4	4	7	Increase great deal
9	10	11	Increase somewhat
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>41</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>54</b>	Left about the same
22	14	15	Decrease somewhat
21	18	12	Decrease great deal
<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	
2	2	1	No opinion
<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please indicate whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say much more, it might require a tax increase to pay for it.)... Culture and the arts

Survey Organization: National Opinion Research Center

1985	1990	1996	
4	2	4	Spend much more
10	10	11	Spend more
<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	
<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>37</b>	Spend same as now
24	21	27	Spend less
15	16	17	Spend much less
<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>44</b>	
7	8	4	No opinion
<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

*Public School Funding for Arts Curriculum*

Do you think that arts courses such as the ones we have just discussed--whether offered for credit or not for credit--should be paid for by the school system as part of the regular school budget, or should the cost of such courses not come from the regular school budget?

Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates  
Research Sponsor: Philip Morris Companies

1980	1987	1992	
75	75	76	Paid by regular school budget

20	20	20	Not paid regular budget
--	--	1	Not offered at all (vol.)
5	5	3	Not sure
100	100	100	

*Support for National Arts Policy*

Other countries in the western world, such as Canada, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, and others all have programs to help individual artists develop. Their governments and private contributors set up special funds that sometimes buy the works of developing artists, sometimes give artists direct grants of money, and sometimes set up professional training facilities for artists. In the U.S., almost no such facilities or programs exist. Do you think there should be such programs for individual artists in the country or not?

Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates  
 Research Sponsor: Philip Morris Companies

1987	1992	
65	70	Should be such government/private programs
31	26	Should not be such programs
4	4	Not sure
100	100	

*Who Should Be Supporting the Arts*

(The options to the questions vary across time, but one thing remains constant: Respondents seem to favor the most "local" level response that is offered in the question. Community groups are favored over business; Business is favored over government; local and state governments are favored over the federal government. One consistent exception is that community groups are favored over individuals.)

MARCH 16-18, 1995

Now I'm going to read a list of goals. For each one, please tell me which of the following groups you think has the greatest responsibility for achieving that goal--government, businesses, community leaders, or individuals?)...  
 ...Promoting culture through museums and concerts

Survey Organization: Hart And Teeter Research Companies  
 Research Sponsor: The Council for Excellence in Government

Government	15%
Businesses	11
Community leaders	44
Individuals	19
All/Combination (vol.)	6
Not sure	5
	100%

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1995

Many people want to see the arts flourish. There's disagreement, though, about who's responsible for that. In your opinion, is financial support for orchestras, theaters, and the like, mainly the responsibility of individuals who attend such performances, the responsibility of local community organizations, or the responsibility of the federal government?

Survey Organization: Institute For Social Inquiry/Roper Center, UCONN  
 Research Sponsor: The Reader's Digest

Responsibility of individuals	34%
-------------------------------	-----

Responsibility of community organizations	48
Responsibility of government	6
Don't know	12
	100%

DECEMBER 1983

There are a number of things that need to be done in our society. Here is a list of some of them. Would you read down that list, and for each one tell me whether you think it is something the government should take primary responsibility for, or something business should take primary responsibility for?...Support of the arts (music, drama, art, etc.)

Survey Organization: Roper Organization

Government	17%
Business	35
Both equally (vol)	18
Neither (vol)	19
Don't know	10

NOVEMBER 1981

I'm going to read you a list of areas in which government might play a role. For each, please tell me if you think the government should play a major role, a minor role, or no role at all?...Fostering the arts

Survey Organization: Roper Organization/Roper Center  
 Research Sponsor: American Enterprise Institute

Major role	20%
Minor role	46
No role	27
Don't know	7

NOVEMBER 1981

I'm going to read you a list of activities that people have suggested the government could be involved with. For each, please tell me if you think it is best provided by the federal government, state government, local government or should mostly be provided outside government?...Fostering the arts

Survey Organization: Roper Organization/Roper Center  
 Research Sponsor: American Enterprise Institute

Federal	14%
State	19
Local	24
Outside government	26
Mix best	9
Don't know	8

DEC 1977-JAN 1978

Which level of government should be most responsible for paying for... cultural facilities, such as libraries, concerts, museums?

Survey Organization: Louis Harris And Associates  
 Research Sponsor: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

Local government	49%
State government	28

Federal government	16
No government	5
Not sure	10

*Government Vs. Expert Oversight of Federally Funded Art*

JUNE 1989

With federal funding of arts projects, some people say federal officials should exercise more control to assure that they don't offend the public. Others say these judgements should be left to independent panels of established arts experts in each field. Which comes closer to your view?

Survey Organization: Gallup Organization  
 Research Sponsor: Newsweek

More official control	22%
Let experts judge	58
Don't know	20

MARCH 1990

Currently, there is a controversy in the U.S. Congress over how the Arts Endowment should operate and whether it should exist at all. (Rotate) Several members of the U.S. Congress, including Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, argue that funding for the Arts Endowment should be cut or eliminated altogether. They charge that the Arts Endowment has funded artists, works of art, and performances that are 'obscene,' 'blasphemous' or 'offensive.' They say that, while artists have the right to do whatever they want, they should not create 'offensive art' with taxpayers' money. Further, they recommend imposing strict regulation on the content of art funded by the Endowment. They also argue that in a time of limited resource, federal funding for the arts should be a low priority because the arts in America can survive without government support. Supporters of the Arts Endowment point out since the Endowment was created 25 years ago, only 20 of 80,000 grants made by the Arts Endowment have been at all controversial. In addition, they contend that without the Arts Endowment, many arts programs serving the states and local communities would be forced to close down. They also argue that to protect the Constitution's guarantee of free expression and to avoid government censorship it is crucial that funding decisions be made by independent panels of diverse citizens knowledgeable in the arts, rather than by politicians. Now that you have heard what people on both sides of the controversy are saying about the Arts Endowment, which side do you agree with?

Survey Organization: Research & Forecasts  
 Research Sponsor: The People for the American Way Action Fund

Cutting funding and stricter controls	13%
Funding decisions made by panels of citizens knowledgeable about the arts	61
Neither side, you're on the fence	22
Need to know more (vol.)	2
Don't know/No answer	2

<sup>1</sup> We do not mean to suggest that this is Bykofsky's point; rather, we suggest that disregard for expertise in any arena implies that policy decisions in that arena will not be left to experts.

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete discussion of democratic theory and the arts, see Cornwell (1990) and especially McWilliams (1985).

<sup>3</sup> There are a number of other policy questions which might be dealt with at the state or local level, rather than the national level. Tracking state level public opinion on the various programs that might exist in the separate the states

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is something we have not endeavored to do at this time. Education policy, including on arts education, is generally set locally or at the state level, but education policy is often debated nationally and public opinion data on arts education do exist.

<sup>4</sup> As anyone familiar with the discussion of arts policy will quickly note, questions of censorship v. artistic expression/ freedom of expression v. the protection and promotion of core values, etc., and the possibility of and/or necessity of regulating the arts are also key policy questions. We only deal briefly with these questions (below) as the way in which they appear in the public opinion polls does not permit analysis across time. Rather, most questions are specific to the Mapplethorpe, Serrano, etc. controversies and the National Endowment for the Arts. The questions generally refer to particular artists, works of art, or political actors, and as such make it difficult to compare across time. Readers who are interested in pursuing this topic are referred to Lang and Lang (1991) and the 1990 report from Research and Forecasts on “The American Public’s Perspective...”.

In addition, much work has been done on participation in the arts. Robinson (1989) reviews the data on participation, comparing the Americans and the Arts studies done by Harris with the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts asked by the Census Bureau. He finds that the Harris studies, particularly because of a sample distribution biased with respect to education, seem to overestimate the actual levels of participation in the arts. At any rate, the Harris studies consistently find higher levels of participation than the SPPA studies.

While one might read the participation studies to indicate support levels for the arts, simply being involved in an activity does not say anything about who should be funding the activity, on what basis it should be available, whether it should be publicly monitored etc.; i.e. there is no inherent public policy concern in the fact that a certain percentage of the population dance or paint, professionally or as amateurs, or like to attend performances or visit museums, etc.

In addition to reviewing the research on participation, Robinson (1997) discusses public opinion and cultural policy, but his focus is different than ours. His review of studies based on the General Social Survey (GSS) suggests some interesting possibilities about the frameworks that people bring when framing their attitudes about the role of the arts in America. He discusses the use of several different attitudinal scales to separate the American public into those who are likely supporters of arts and cultural policy and those who are likely to be opposed.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion below on the *Americans and the Arts* series; see Robinson (1997); see also “The Public and the Arts: Attendance, Participation, and Opinion” (publication info?).

<sup>6</sup> For those unfamiliar with the American Assembly, it “was established by Dwight D. Eisenhower at Columbia University in 1950. Each year it holds at least two nonpartisan meetings that give rise to authoritative books that illuminate issues of United States policy.” From May 29 through June 1, 1997, the Ninety-second American Assembly was held at Arden House, Harriman, New York on the subject of “The Arts and the Public Purpose.”

<sup>7</sup> For a further discussion of specific public policy issues, see the various essays in Smith and Berman (1992).

<sup>8</sup> While the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution should be familiar, it should be noted that this presentation draws directly from Wyszomirski’s (1997) discussion (p.2).

<sup>1</sup> Full citations for these studies can be found in the References.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Harris asked the following question to gauge support for the NEA:

The goal of the National Endowment for the Arts, also known as the Arts Endowment, is to foster professional excellence in the arts in America, to nurture and sustain them, and to help create a climate in which they may flourish so they may be experienced and enjoyed by the widest possible public. The Arts Endowment awards grants to individuals, state and regional arts agencies and non-profit organizations representing the highest quality in the fields of performing and visual arts, folk arts, literature, film, radio, television and museums. Funding decisions by the Arts Endowment are made by diverse committees of citizens knowledgeable about the arts, drawn from across the country. Based on not just what you know is true but your impressions, expectations, or anything else you have read or heard about the Arts Endowment, please answer the next statements as to whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree.

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<sup>3</sup> In a previous study (Filicko 1996):

We searched the archives of the Public Opinion Location Library (POLL) of the Roper Center for any and all questions on the arts. For a question to show up in our search results, the word “art” or some form of the word “art” had to show up in either the question or answer.

In addition to looking at the wording of the questions, we were also interested in seeing when the questions were asked (YEAR), by whom (SOURCE), for whom (SPONSOR), and of what kind of a sample. There were 885 separate questions.

Across this set of questions, the earliest question is one asked by the Roper Organization in 1939 of a national adult sample in personal interviews. ... The most recent question was asked in telephone interviews of a national adult sample in April, 1996 by Princeton Research Associates for the Pew Research Center....

... A majority of the questions (64.3%) fall into one of the following categories:

**PARTICIPATION** (11.3% of the total questions; 100 questions)

**ATTITUDES ABOUT PARTICIPATION** (10.7%; 95)

**CONTRIBUTIONS/ VOLUNTEERING** (5.2%; 46)

**SCHOOLING/ CLASSES** (15.9%; 141)

**FUNDING** (15.5%; 137)

**THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL LEADERS,  
AND INSTITUTIONS** (5.7%; 50)

All other categories, with the exception of a **MISCELLANEOUS** category, represent under 5% of the total questions each. The Miscellaneous category includes 8.8% of the questions (78 questions). The smaller categories are:

**THE ARTS AS A PROFESSION** -- 4.7% (42 questions)

**SPECIFIC ARTISTS** -- 3.1% (27)

**OBSCENITY IN THE ARTS** -- 2.8% (25)

**CULTURAL IDENTITY/ CULTURAL EXCHANGE** -- 2.6% (23)

**GENDER AND THE ARTS** --1.8% (16)

**LIKES AND DISLIKES** -- 1.9% (17)

**CHILDREN AND THE ARTS** -- 3.6% (32)

**COLLECTING/ INVESTMENTS** -- 3.3% (29)

**FACILITIES AND AVAILABILITY** -- 1.8% (16)

<sup>1</sup> In a previous study, Filicko and Saad (1996; see also Filicko, 1996)) used the Roper Center’s POLL database to generate a list of all of the questions that had been asked which included the word “art” or some form thereof. Following the review of “arts questions” a similar search of the database was done for the word “culture” and other forms of this word. This search generated approximately 325 additional surveys questions, asked between 1943 and 1995. Those questions serve as the basis for the brief discussion that follows. The current author is indebted to Lydia Saad, Managing Editor of the Gallup Poll, for her assistance in this project.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that we do not have data which can be used to compare masses and elites on these questions. The tendency is to define “arts elites” as those who attend or participate more often. That is not a particularly useful definition for a “policy” elite. There should be some overlap, but they’re not the same groups.