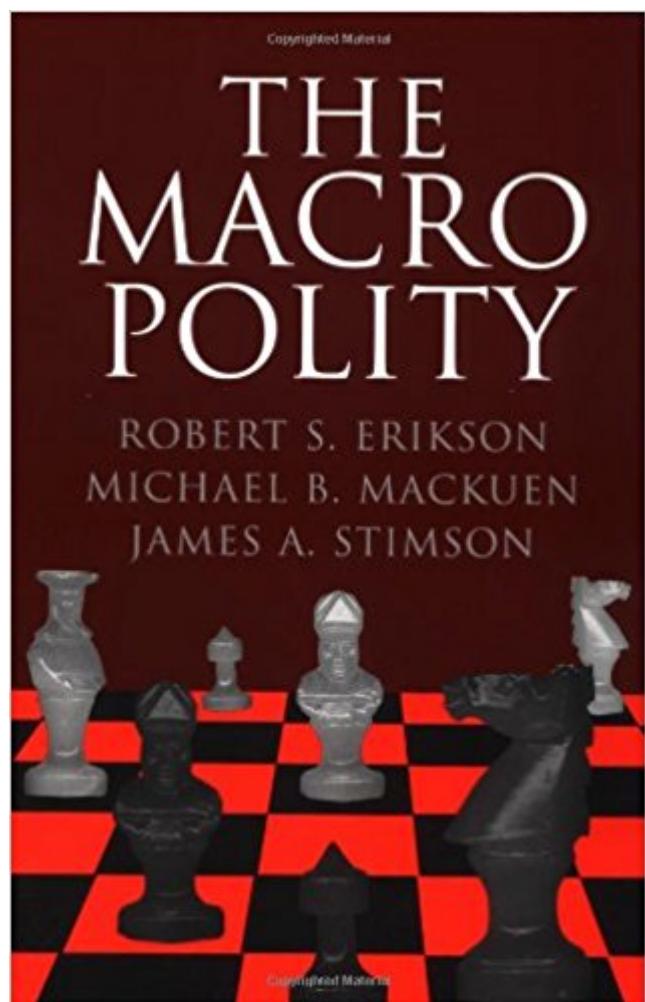


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# The Macro Polity (Cambridge Studies In Public Opinion And Political Psychology)



## **Synopsis**

The Macro Polity provides the first comprehensive model of American politics at the system level. Focusing on the interactions between citizen evaluations and preferences, government activity and policy, and how the combined acts of citizens and governments influence one another over time, it integrates understandings of matters such as economic outcomes, presidential approval, partisanship, elections, and government policy-making into a single model. The book's macro and longitudinal focus makes it possible to directly connect the behaviors of electorate and government.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"The authors of this ambitious, important work have crafted a dynamic 'macro' model of many aspects of US public opinion, when taken as a whole.... [T]he book's analysis is detailed and clear.... ^The Macro Polity is an impressive work that will be controversial and influential. Recommended for upper-division undergraduates and above." Choice "[This] long-awaited book does not disappoint. It is the first comprehensive study of U.S. macro political system dynamics over time. Their aggregate research design generates novel findings that are fundamental to politics and political science...Two pathbreaking contributions will linger with readers for a long time: first, the authors' work on drawing critical linkages among important macro processes that are typically studied in isolation, and second, the synergy the authors create by bringing together the two fields of micro and macro political behavior. Their extensive work accomplishes so much by shifting the

perspective of political scientists. The Macro Polity will undoubtedly affect the research agenda of many scholars for years to come. It will be an early entry on any list of 'The Classics' in political science." *Perspectives on Politics*

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This is one of the most interesting and important books on public opinion published in recent years. It is a direct descendant of V. O. Key's wonderful little book, "The Responsible Electorate." Erikson et al. explore the dynamics related to the "macro polity." Many works on political behavior and public opinion focus on individuals, using survey research results. This book aggregates the survey results to the level of the citizenry at large, and traces changes (and their effects) in the public mind over time. The authors follow the public mind from the Eisenhower through the Clinton years. On the one hand, this is only a limited slice of American history. On the other hand, this is the period (starting with Eisenhower) when we have the most useful survey data. This is an academic work, and readers need to understand that. To critique this as too academic is to misunderstand the focus and purpose of this work. Nonetheless, even nonacademics can learn a great deal from this work if they persevere. Studies of individual citizens' attitudes and behavior are not flattering. Individuals are rather ill-informed, don't have a great deal of accurate knowledge of politics, and express attitudes and opinions that they may not really have. But a study of the "macro polity" yields another picture--of a collective wisdom that is far more astute than the individual level data might suggest. That's a key point of this book (as well as others like Page's and Shapiro's "The Rational Public"). On page xxi, the authors state this explicitly: "It is true that individual Americans have a weak grasp on the essentials of economics and economic policy, and it is also true that Americans, in the aggregate, are highly sensitive to real economic performance." In short, ". . . electorates are not myopic. . . ." One of the most important aspects of this work is its demonstration that public policy decisions by government actually seem to be affected by changes in aggregate public political views. By examining the relationship between policy decisions by various government entities (Congress, President, Supreme Court, for example), the authors conclude that (page 314) "Public

opinion influences public policy."In an interesting experiment, the authors simulate what would have happened to the public mind, to party control of government, and so on if Jimmy Carter had won re-election in 1980. Chapter 10 is a provocative chapter, exploring "What might have been."All in all, this is one of the more important and well done volumes focusing on public opinion--and its impact on politics (and the effects of politics on public opinion) in recent years. For academics, a great read. For nonacademics, this may be a tougher read, but it would be well worthwhile to persevere.

Anyone interested in research, political science, the electorate and their behavior needs to read this book - especially political science scholars (of all fields). It's not a terrifically fun read, but it is important to read. Any American scholar or comparative scholar should have this in their library.

Brilliant comprehensive look at American politics.

If you really want to understand American politics from some of the best scholars who study it, this is the book to buy. Whether you're interested in voting behavior, political institutions, representation, policy or how they all come together in our American system of government, this is it. A truly seminal work.

This is a book that deserves to be influential in the field of political science, for both good and bad reasons. The theories presented here deal with macro-level or system-wide trends in American political behavior. If the authors can be believed, there was little previous work done in this area. Instead, political science focused on the behavior of individuals and then tried to aggregate the resulting data into system-wide theories. The evidence indicates that the behavior of the public is not always "the sum of the parts" and there are specific phenomena at play that influence the larger electorate, at the system level. The authors have conducted an impressive amount of research, which probably took years, including macro-level data about voting patterns, partisanship, ideological trends, presidential approval, and public opinion. Their conclusions about the existence of macro-level phenomena are generally believable and supported by the evidence, and their work will probably prove to be groundbreaking in the field. On the other hand, this book embodies everything that is wrong with the academic side of political science these days. At least the authors will be accepted by their peers who value method more than insight. Here it becomes more important to impress one's peers by piling on endlessly repetitive evidence and trotting out unnecessarily complex statistical equations, all to prop up points that were already made

convincingly in prose form. Each chapter in this book makes strong and believable points, but then degenerates into the worst of academic tedium, indicating that the authors chose (or were forced) to please ivory-tower editors and academic committees, rather than people in the outside world who could truly make use of their findings. Hence, we have a book with strong and often illuminating conclusions, sunk by the worst in academic writing and presentation. Next time these authors (and their publishers) choose to release their findings for consumption by the public, they should realize that this audience expects insight, not long-winded theorizing and statistics. [~doomsdayer520~]

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