

But there were also important changes on the demand side of the system. As various observers have documented, the 1960s and 1970s saw an “advocacy explosion.”²² The number of organized interests exploded in those decades. No doubt there was some interaction between the formation of interests and the supply-side changes: the easier it was to participate in electoral and institutional processes, the more incentive there was to do so, but political scientists have not yet worked out the dynamic. At any rate, relative to a generation ago, a strikingly more open political process now faces a strikingly larger number of interest groups.

Organized interests are not the only actor on the demand side, of course. Even the potential influence of the ordinary unorganized citizen increased. Opinion polls and attention to them burgeoned in the 1970s (see Figure 11-3), giving politicians more accurate and up-to-date information about public opinion than they had ever had before. Instant reaction to political events and decisions has become commonplace.

Other technological innovations closed the distance between the demand and supply sides. Individual politicians developed direct-mail appeals for funds and support and took advantage of other communications advances to get their messages out. But groups and individuals were able to use the same innovations to press their demands and get their messages in. Today aroused constituents can communicate their views to politicians almost instantaneously. In 1994, for example, an aroused home-schooling movement stampeded the House of Representatives with half a million communications in a matter of days, overwhelming Capitol Hill switchboards and fax machines.²³

In sum, the political system of John Kennedy’s America was far different from that of Bill Clinton’s America. The “elitist” democracy of the 1960s Yale pluralists has been supplanted by the “populist” democracy of today, as Robert Dahl himself recently has argued.²⁴ Contemporary Americans have far more opportunities to influence their government directly than did Americans of midcentury. And therein lies the irony: contemporary Americans are far more distrustful of, cynical about, and hostile toward that government. Americans trusted their government more when party bosses chose nominees, when Southern committee barons dominated Congress, when legislatures and boards conducted their business

22. Important studies include Schlozman and Tierney (1986) and Walker (1991).

23. This episode is described in Fiorina and Peterson (1998, pp. 199–200).

24. Dahl decries this development in *The New American Political (Dis)Order* (1994).