

**The American Public and the Room to Maneuver:
Responsibility Attributions and Policy Efficacy in an Era of Globalization**

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Abstract

Despite the increasing integration of markets, most political scientists contend that governments retain much policy “room to maneuver.” Moreover, citizens presumably support further economic integration because they believe their governments can cushion the impacts of market forces. In this sense, globalization is compatible with democracy. Rarely, however, are data provided that demonstrate citizens’ appreciation for the room to maneuver, let alone their positive evaluation of it. Who do citizens identify as most responsible for the performance of the U.S. economy, elected officials or national and international market forces? Which citizens attribute economic performance to these forces and not to their elected officials? In this paper, we report results from an original experiment designed to answer these questions. We find that a good number of Americans believe that their government retains the room to maneuver. However, there exists a substantial minority that does not. We show, consistent with recent developments in the study of political psychology on distal associations and partisan motivated reasoning, that this minority is characterized according to partisanship, knowledge levels, and age. Republican partisans and more educated citizens believe there is less room to maneuver more than Democratic partisans and members of older age cohorts. Generational factors also shape beliefs in the efficacy of policy control. Finally, priming subjects to think about economic globalization does not affect their responsibility attributions. The choice set matters, however. When provided the option, a significant number of respondents assign responsibility to market forces rather than elected officials.

Despite the increasing integration of world markets, most students of American politics argue that voters influence the policy choices made by their representatives, who, in turn, shape macroeconomic outcomes. For example, Ansolabehere et al. (2006) contend that, despite popular claims to the contrary, macroeconomic outcomes—or perceptions thereof—continue to affect voters choices in the United States. More generally, the conventional wisdom among students of the political economy of advanced capitalist democracies is that there remain major differences in monetary, tax, and spending policies and, concomitantly, significant differences across countries in prices, employment, and other macroeconomic outcomes. Thus, in this sense, governments retain much “room to maneuver”(Garrett 1998; see also, Bearce 2007; Franzese 2002; Iversen 2005; Mosley 2000; Steinmo 2002). Citizens presumably agree to increased trade and direct foreign investment because they believe that through economic policies their governments can cushion the impacts of international economic forces (Ruggie 1982; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). In this sense, economic globalization is compatible with democracy.

However, current studies assume the public’s appreciation for the room to maneuver. Scholars *assert* citizens’ understanding and positive evaluation of their government’s capacity for managing the macroeconomy. For example, Mosley (2000, 751) maintains that even though world markets imposed constraints on governments management of prices and spending, British elections during the 1990s were meaningful contests over economic policy. But, in fact, micro-level data suggest that the voters have something much different in mind. In 2001 a national sample of Britons were asked “In today’s worldwide economy, how much influence do you think British governments have on the British economy?” Almost half (43%) responded with either “not very much” or “hardly any.” (Heath et al. 2002). A similar question asked in France in 1997 found that 53% thought their government had either “not very much” or “very little” room to

maneuver (CEVIPOF et al. 2001). And a 2001 poll of citizens in 15 European countries found that twice as many agreed with the statement “globalization cannot be controlled by governments” as disagreed with it (Christensen 2003).

Such results are inconsistent with the conventional wisdom. They suggest that citizens do not appreciate the policy and macroeconomic divergence scholars have found, that they do not attribute economic performance to decisions made by their elected officials, or some combination of both. A better understanding of the publics’ perceptions is critical for understanding how international markets matter for mass politics. If citizens think their governments are severely constrained by market integration, their support for economic policies is hard to justify. If citizens believe that there is room to maneuver, their support for policies should be based on a belief in the efficacy of their government’s policies (see, e.g., Hellwig and Samuels 2007; Sattler et al. 2007; Sattler et. al. forthcoming).

This paper provides the first analysis of citizen perceptions of the room to maneuver in the United States. Parting from the spatially aggregated, observational analyses employed in previous studies, we test research claims using data from an original TESS (Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences) survey experiment. Drawing on recent insights in the public opinion and political psychology literatures, we address two questions. First, who do citizens identify as most responsible for the state of the American economy, domestic actors or national and international market forces? Second, what attributes determine whether an individual believes in the room to maneuver?

Unlike the European publics mentioned above, we find that many Americans believe their governments retain the room to maneuver. However, there exists a substantial minority—mostly Republican identifiers and more educated citizens—that does not. Contrary to current

scholarship in American political economy, nonbelievers in the room to maneuver think national and international market forces are mainly responsible for macroeconomic performance.

Methodologically, our experiment shows that priming subjects to think explicitly about economic globalization does *not* affect their responsibility attributions. However, when provided the option of attributing economic conditions to national and international business cycles, over one-third of respondents assign responsibility to those market forces—far more than attribute outcomes to the policies of the president or to Congress. Subsequent analyses show that partisanship, knowledge, and age cohort work in combination to shape individual beliefs in the room to maneuver.

The presentation divided into four parts. The next section surveys the relevant scholarship pertaining to the room to maneuver. As noted, the political economy literature does not provide useful insights into the causes and consequences of the public's perceptions of government's ability to influence the open macroeconomy. Therefore we turn to recent work in political psychology and public opinion, paying particular attention to the role of partisanship in affecting how citizens reason about policymaker capacity. A consideration of micro-level attributes, including party identification, knowledge and age cohort produces a set of testable hypotheses. Section 3 presents our experimental design. Section 4 reports the results of our tests of the hypotheses. We conclude with a call for further investigation into connections between partisan attachments and policy preferences in open economies both in the United States and in comparative perspective.

The International Economy, Responsibility Attributions, and Public Opinion

Many literatures bear on questions of public beliefs in the room to maneuver. The most obvious of these is the literature on economic voting. A familiar argument in this genre is that

voters retrospectively evaluate the state of the economy and then use this information to reward or punish the incumbent executive. This reward-punishment model of economic voting has been challenged on several grounds. One body of work contends that individual attributes condition the effect of policy evaluations. Sources of heterogeneity include political sophistication, social class, political interest, and partisan attachments (Duch et al. 2000; Evans and Andersen 2006; Gomez and Wilson 2001). Another body of work emphasizes the role of policy preferences and how party competencies over policy affects accountability (Budge and Farlie 1983; Hibbs 1977).¹ A third body of research focuses on variation in the *target* of evaluation. It emphasizes the extent to which voters spread credit and blame among elected officials, public agencies, and private-sector actors (Gomez and Wilson 2003; Peffley 1985; Peffley and Williams 1985; Rudolph 2003a, 2003b, 2006).

All these investigations maintain that, “the most critical cognitive element involved in economic voting is the process of causal attribution” (Gomez and Wilson 2003, 273; Peffley and Williams 1985). Citizens must believe that their elected (public) officials are responsible for economic outcomes if they are to hold them accountable. Gauging this “causal attribution” is the key to understanding how citizens perceive their government room to maneuver. What theoretical expectations do political scientists have about how citizens make this attribution? Work in the fields of political psychology and public opinion suggests some answers to this question.

Distal Associations and the Room to Maneuver

The distinction between proximate and distal associations has been found useful in political psychology and other fields (Sniderman et al. 1991). Simply put, the former is a tendency for individuals to ascribe responsibility for observed outcomes to the most obvious, single source.

The latter leads people to blame or assign credit to multiple sources. This literature suggests that citizens who are more prone (able) to engage in distal reasoning will be more likely to attribute macroeconomic outcomes to national and international markets than those who engage in proximal reasoning.

Partisanship may color if not bias both distal and proximate forms of cognitive associations. In particular, some students of American public opinion maintain that Democrats and Republicans have fundamentally different conceptions of responsibility. Feldman and Zaller (1992), for example, show that Republican identifiers value personal responsibility to a far greater extent than Democrats. These asymmetric effects of partisan identification should have implications for how individuals attribute responsibility. In particular, given their penchant for personal responsibility and disdain for intervention in markets, Republicans should be more likely to believe that private-sector actors and not government policymakers are most responsible for macroeconomic performance.

Age and knowledge levels also may affect the tendencies of individuals to make proximate and distal associations. Respondents who lived through decades of activist Democratic administrations might be better able to gauge the growing influence of international market forces. For example, older citizens might be more aware of how ties to the world economy undermined the effectiveness of the Keynesian policies of past American governments. In recent years Keynesianism has been discredited, not only by Republicans but by most Democratic office-holders as well. Younger individuals are thus less likely to fully comprehend how market forces have imposed greater and greater constraints on their government's policy latitude. Finally, knowledge about how the macroeconomy works would appear essential to causal attributions. More knowledgeable respondents ought to be more likely to engage in distal

reasoning and to understand the growing influence of international constraints on government. Methodologically, if these individuals are primed to think about market forces, they ought to be even more likely to emphasize distal consistency in their assignment of policy responsibility and thus make causal attributions that are inconsistent with the idea of the room to maneuver.

This first set of expectations is illustrated in work by Gomez and Wilson (2001, 2003) on cognitive heterogeneity. Their theory of heterogeneous attributions predicts that more sophisticated individuals are capable of diffuse attributions whereas low sophisticates tend to assign responsibility for the economy entirely to the President. As a test of their theory, Gomez and Wilson (2003) analyze responses to a 1998 American National Election Studies (ANES) item asking respondents to choose who, among the President, Congress, “working people,” and “business people,” is responsible for macroeconomic conditions. They find that high sophisticates—people who use distal reasoning—tend to be nearly five times more likely to attribute responsibility to “business people” than to the President (Gomez and Wilson 2003, 277-78). A similar result was produced by Rudolph (2003b) who shows that individuals with more years of formal education are more likely to attribute responsibility to business than to the President.

Given limitations of the closed-ended response options to the ANES question, Gomez and Wilson (2003) also model the probability of assigning responsibility for the economy to a respondent-volunteered “others” category. They find that the most politically knowledgeable Americans are almost 17 times more likely to respond that some member of this “others” category is primarily responsible for economic conditions than to credit or blame the chief executive. This result raises a methodological issue: do the ANES response categories artificially constrain respondent’s choice? Who—or what—is this “other” chosen by high sophisticates? As

we show below, when given the opportunity, many people assign responsibility to national and international market forces rather than to any of the actors in the ANES question.

Partisan Motivated Reasoning and the Beliefs in the Room to Maneuver

The literature on partisan motivated reasoning produces a different set of expectations. Theories of motivated reasoning contend that individual behavior is motivated by accuracy goals, or the desire to reach the most accurate conclusion, as well as by directional goals, which pertain to the desire to reach a preferred conclusion. When motivated by directional goals, individuals process information in a more affectively charged, biased manner, favoring confirming evidence at the expense of disconfirming evidence (Lodge and Taber 2000; Rudolph 2006).

Situational context may provide incentives for political attitudes to be motivated by directional goals rather than accuracy goals (Lodge and Taber 2000). When it comes to citizens' perceptions of the policy room to maneuver, we contend that the integration of world markets provides just such a context. If citizens believe governments have some capacity to influence economic outcomes—even when primed to think about economic globalization—then their causal attributions ought to reflect partisan biases. For their part, political elites encourage these biases. Elites strive to convince citizens that their party is responsible for favorable conditions and, at the same time, had no hand in creating unfavorable ones. On these grounds Democrats and Republicans will craft different messages about responsibility, blaming market forces for undesirable outcomes. These competing messages, or opposing communication flows (Zaller 1992), create a complex environment for citizens seeking to assign responsibility to political actors.

Drawing on theories of social psychology, Rudolph (2003b) argues that partisanship aids citizens in processing information. He proposes a rationalization hypothesis that predicts the effects of economic performance evaluations on responsibility attributions will be conditioned by respondents' partisanship. When the economy is performing well, individuals will attribute responsibility to offices controlled by their preferred party; the converse will occur when conditions are poor. Rudolph's findings pertaining to responsibility attributions are consistent with more recent research on partisan resistance in the formation and revision of policy opinions, broadly considered (Gaines *et al.* 2007; Taber and Lodge 2006).

In a parallel series of papers, Bartels (2002) and Achen and Bartels (2004, 2005, 2006) propose a model of partisan inference to explain what they call "systematic attribution error." While Gomez and Wilson and others argue that economic voting is conditional on knowledge levels, Achen and Bartels essentially reject the idea of rational retrospective voting. As they see it, citizens are only "blindly and myopically retrospective." People react to events on election day sometimes even attributing responsibility for natural disasters to elected officials. Even citizens knowledge of basic facts are subject to attribution error. For example, people's understanding of the budget deficit under President Clinton was "four parts folk wisdom, one part partisan influence and a trace element of reality" (2006, 45).² Making a judgment about a complex idea like the room to maneuver is, in view of Achen and Bartels writings, virtually certain to reflect these biases, regardless of priming about market forces.

Partisan bias also should be affected by variables like knowledge and age. Democratic identifiers ought to be especially prone to this kind of reasoning because the "folklore" of their party stresses the capacity of government to change economic conditions, viz., the history of Keynesian policies adopted by Democratic administrations in the previous century (see, e.g.,

Bartels 2002, 7; Achen and Bartels 2006, 16). Some scholars argue that partisanship serves as a cognitive heuristic for the uninformed: when faced with new information about a given policy initiative, citizens lean on their partisan moorings to make sense of things and, then voice support accordingly (e.g., Brady and Sniderman 1985). Partisan biases should thus be stronger among the less-informed respondents than those with a firm grasp of the facts. Others, however, suggest that partisan biases are stronger among the more informed: respondents who are more informed should recognize persuasive messages as inconsistent with their partisan leanings and, therefore, biases should occur only among those more knowledgeable about politics (Achen and Bartels 2006; Zaller 1992). However, it is unclear whether priming the more (less) informed to think about market forces will increase their propensity to reveal these biases.

Finally, as regards age, the content of partisan reasoning might reflect how Democrats and Republicans were socialized into political life. For many older individuals—those who came of age during the 1960s and 1970s—beliefs about the efficacy of government intervention in the economy constitutes a prominent dividing line between the parties: whereas Democrats in office would go to great lengths to smooth business cycles, Republican politicians eschewed such intervention. In more recent years, however, the wisdom of Keynesian policies has been questioned by leaders of both parties. Younger partisans may therefore be likely to base their identifications on an all-together different set of appeals and, in turn, be less likely to make causal attributions that connote the room to maneuver. Older and better informed individuals may rely more on partisan dispositions when assessing objective facts—such as the size of the federal deficit (Achen and Bartels 2006, 19)—than the young and less informed. Thus, priming younger respondents to think about market forces might increase the likelihood of eliciting negative responses about the room to maneuver.

In sum, the literature on partisan motivated reasoning suggests that partisanship, more than any other variable, will affect citizens judgments about their government's room to maneuver. Democratic identifiers should be most prone to answer in the affirmative when asked about this issue. The expected responses of Republicans are less clear because, among other things, the folklore of Republican administrations is far less associated with Keynesian demand management and the idea of "fine-tuning" the economy. Demographic factors should also be correlated with the responses citizens give when asked about the room to maneuver. Only the most knowledgeable individuals should be able to provide an accurate assessment of the U.S. government's room to maneuver. Methodologically, priming individuals to think about market forces may make it more likely that the most informed individuals recognize constraints on the government's room to maneuver. Question primes, however, should have little or no effect on the less educated, older, and stronger party identifiers.

Hypotheses

The literature from political psychology and public opinion imply the following hypotheses pertaining to responsibility attributions and beliefs in the room to maneuver. The literature on proximate and distal associations leads to a pair of hypotheses:

H1. The more knowledgeable an individual, the more likely he or she is to assign responsibility for economic performance to multiple sources and, hence, to market forces. We should observe an increase in the no room to maneuver response as individuals become more knowledgeable. This effect may be observed only at the highest informational levels (Achen and Bartels 2006). But it should occur, at some level, regardless of partisan bias (Gomez and Wilson 2003).

H2. Question wording effects—priming individuals about national and international market forces and/or adding an item for national and international business cycles in the choice set—should increase the propensity of assigning responsibility to those market forces rather than to elected officials. Again, this should be especially true for the most knowledgeable respondents.

The work on partisanship and on partisan motivated reasoning yields the following, somewhat different, set of expectations:

H3. Because of their penchant for personal responsibility and relative dislike of government intervention in the economy, Republicans will be more likely than Democrats to assign responsibility to market forces than to elected officials and, thus, more likely to be non-believers in the room to maneuver (Feldman and Zaller 1992).

H4. Partisans rationalize. An individual is likely to believe in the room to maneuver when his or her preferred party is in office provided the economy is performing well. If the economy is performing poorly, then the individual will be less likely to believe in the room to maneuver. The opposite should hold if the individual's party is not in office (Rudolph 2003b).

H5. Because of their greater acceptance of the Keynesian folklore, older Democrats will be more likely to respond that there is room to maneuver than older Republicans and younger respondents of either party.

Research Design: Experiments Embedded in A Random Sample Survey of the American Public

The data used to test these hypotheses are from a survey module conducted through the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) project.³ The national, random-

sample survey was administered to 514 American adults between November 2005 and February 2006 by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University. The instrument underwent an extensive pretesting in order to improve response rate and item reliability. The sample compares well to the U.S. population at the time.⁴ As summarized in Table 1, the experiment is carried out in two stages, which we label the responsibility attribution experiment and the room to maneuver experiment.

<Table 1 about here>

Question Wording and Responsibility Attribution

The first stage was designed to assess whether priming or additional response options affect respondent choices.⁵ Subjects were randomly assigned to eight, mutually exclusive groups. Groups 1-4 received four different versions of the standard ANES responsibility attributions question employed by Gomez and Wilson (2003) and Rudolph (2003b). Groups 5-8 were asked different versions of British survey questions on the government's capacity to manage the economy.

As regards treatments based on the ANES question, TESS Group 1 served as our control. It received a question identical to that which was asked in the 1998 study: "Please tell me who you feel is most responsible for the economic conditions in the United States in the past few years, the Congress, the President, working people, or business people." This question allows us to analyze whether citizens attribute outcomes to elected officials or to private-sector actors. It also has the desirable property of leaving it up to the respondent as to whether "economic conditions in the past few years" have been either good or bad. Response options, however, are limited to domestic and non-market actors alone. To determine if adding an additional item about national and international market forces changed the responsibility attributions of subjects, TESS

Group 2 also was given an additional option. Drawing on a 2001 NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll on the influence of “cycles” on economic performance, these respondents were provided the four items in the ANES question plus a fifth item: “national and international business cycles.”⁶

Neither the ANES nor the NBC/WSJ polls make any reference to the constraints imposed on our government by the world economy. To determine if priming respondents to think about international market forces would alter their responses, we included two additional treatments. Individuals in TESS Group 3 received the ANES question but were also primed with the following lead-in: “In terms of trade and finance, the United States is now deeply involved in the world economy. In view of this, who is most responsible for the economic conditions in our country in the last few years, the Congress, the President, working people, or business people?” TESS Group 4 received both the same prime about U.S. involvement in the world economy and the additional, fifth response option from the NBC/WSJ poll (“national and international business cycles”).⁷

TESS Groups 5-8 were asked about their government’s capacity to influence the macroeconomy. To be more specific, they were asked different versions of two questions, one asked in 2001 by the British Election Panel Study (BEPS, Heath et al. 2002) and the other asked in the 1986 British Social Survey (BSS).⁸ The former is, “In today’s world-wide economy, how much influence do you think British governments have on Britain’s economy?” In one version of the question, posed to TESS Group 5, we omitted the opening reference to “today’s world-wide economy.” This prime was left in for TESS Group 6. The BSS item was more complex: “Some people say that British governments nowadays—of whichever party—can actually do very little to change things. Others say they can do quite a bit. Do you think British governments nowadays can do very little or quite a bit to a) keep prices down, b) reduce unemployment c) reduce taxes

d) improve the standard of living e) improve health and human services and f) control wage and price increases?” We asked only a) and b). In light of evidence that Americans support training programs for displaced workers (Scheve and Slaughter 2001), we also added a third item:

“World trade causes some American workers to lose their jobs. Do you think the American government can do very little or quite a bit to help these workers?” We again varied the prime the groups received. TESS Group 7 received no priming while TESS Group 8 was primed with a lead-in of “Some say that because of the world economy...”⁹

Who Believes the Government has the Room to Maneuver?

The second stage of our experiment has three objectives. First, we seek to separate “non-believers” in the room to maneuver from the public at large. Second, we want to determine how membership in the group of non-believers affects political attitudes. And third, we want to ascertain whether “believers” and “non-believers” differ in how they reason about the world economy and about the choices confronting their government. Results we report in this essay pertain primarily to the first of these three objectives.

In order to distinguish individuals who believe policymakers have the capacity to influence the economy from those who do not, we used the following design. We assigned the following subjects to a subset we label *Believers in Room to Maneuver*:

- 1) Subjects from TESS Groups 1-4 who, regardless of priming and/or the option of choosing “national and international business cycles,” attributed responsibility for the economy to the Congress or the President or
- 2) Subjects from TESS Groups 5 and 6 who responded to the questions about government influence with “A great deal” or “Quite a lot” or

- 3) Subjects from TESS Groups 7 and 8 who answered in the affirmative to the each of the questions about government influence over prices, unemployment, and worker assistance.¹⁰

This amounted to 296 subjects.

The subset of respondents who are *Non-Believers in Room to Maneuver* was taken only from those groups of subjects who received the primes for the world economy.¹¹ These subjects had to satisfy *each* of the following conditions:

- 1) Subjects in TESS Groups 3 and 4 who, after hearing a reference to the world economy in the opening to the question, attributed responsibility for the economy to business people, working people, or national and economic business cycles; and
- 2) Subjects in TESS Group 6 who said the American government had “Not very much” or “Hardly any influence” over America’s economy and
- 3) Subjects in TESS Group 8 who answered in the negative to the multi-part question.¹²

By this assignment rule, a total of 82 subjects were identified as not believing in the room to maneuver.¹³

Having identified people who hold these two distinct beliefs, we then inquire about their political views. Two questions were posed to both subsets. The first question was designed to ascertain whether *Believers* and *Non-Believers* differ in their perceptions of party policy competency. All respondents were asked: “Which political party do you think does the best job of making economic policy for the world economy? Would you say the Democrats, the Republicans, or do both parties do an equally good job?” To assess support for our system of government more broadly, we also asked both groups how satisfied they are with “the way our democracy works.”

Believers and *Non-Believers* were then asked tailored questions designed to better understand how they conceived of government capacity to affect the economy.¹⁴ To check that they are convinced of government's capacity to influence the macroeconomy, *Believers* were asked, "Some people say in response to international economic forces, our government should do more to manage prices, create jobs, and help people whose livelihood is affected by trade. Others say that government does too much already. Which of these responses best describes what you think: A) Our government should do more nationally, B) The amount of government involvement in the national economy is about right, or C) The government does too much already." Reflecting their belief in room to maneuver, 76% of these 296 respondents in this category chose A or B.

Finally, subjects identified as non-believers in the room to maneuver were queried about the notion of market discipline. These subjects were asked the question: "Some people say that the world economy strongly encourages our government to make good policies. Others say that the world economy strongly encourages our government to make policies that harm the American people. Which is closer to your opinion: The world economy strongly encourages our government to make good policies, [or] The world economy strongly encourages our government to make policies that harm the American people." Responses to this item should shed light on whether or not nonbelievers are more likely than believers to ascribe to the idea of market discipline.

The Appendix to this article reports full details of the questionnaire and response options, while Table 1 summarizes the overall experimental design.

Analysis and Results

Priming and the Option of Attributing Economic Performance to National and International Business Cycles

We begin by examining responsibility attributions using our modified version of the ANES responsibility attribution question for TESS Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4. Table 2 reports the frequencies for each of the four groups.¹⁵ For sake of comparison, we also report frequencies from the 1998 ANES question, as reported in Rudolph (2003b). Several results are of note. First, while responses for TESS Group 1 generally match closely with the ANES survey, more respondents in the former identified the President as responsible (31.1% versus 21.5%), while fewer attributed economic conditions to working people (6.8% compared to 16.1% for the ANES sample). The first difference may be attributable to the divided government, present in 1998 but not 2005-06. Researchers have shown that divided government tends to moderate accountability (Norpoth 2001; Rudolph 2003a). The second difference might be due to partisanship of the presidency and perceived primary constituencies, which was Democratic in 1998 and Republican in 2005. Second, a substantial number of respondents attribute responsibility to national and international business cycles *if given the opportunity to do so*. When given this option (as in Groups 2 and 4), about one-third of respondents identified national and international business cycles as chiefly responsible for economic conditions. Priming respondents to think about the world economy, however, has no effect on the distribution of responses. A χ^2 statistic for the effect of priming for those groups which received it (Groups 3 and 4) against those which did not (Groups 1 and 2) fails to reject the null of no difference due to priming effects.¹⁶

<Table 2 about here>

Given the lack of priming effects, we pool subjects from Groups 1 and 3 and from Groups 2 and 4 to examine whether responses to attribution questions varies from the null hypothesis of an equal distribution across response options. For subjects receiving four response options (Groups 1 and 3), the null expectation is a frequency of 25 percent for each response option. We reject this null of an equal distribution ($\chi^2 = 22.64, p < 0.001$). Specifically, the size of the working people response is below its expected value while those for Congress, business people, and the President response appear more frequently than if responses were equally distributed across categories. We also reject the null of an equal distribution for the five response option groups (Groups 2 and 4) ($\chi^2 = 20.21, p < 0.001$). For these subjects, the sizes of the Congress and working people responses are below the expected values while those for the President, business people, and business cycles options are above the expected values for equal distribution across categories. Both sets of results indicate that responses are not randomly distributed across response options provided.

Thus, comparisons across experimental treatments imply that a substantial share of Americans attribute economic performance to national and international market forces and not to policymakers. This evidence supports Hypothesis 2. It implies that by not providing a full set of response options, previous analyses of American public opinion overestimate the share of the citizenry that attribute responsibility for economic performance to elected policymakers (Congress and the President) and underestimate the share that attributes responsibility to market forces (national and international business cycles). Thus, any model of the attribution process that omits consideration of the role of national and international market forces appears to be incomplete (e.g., Gomez and Wilson 2003; Rudolph, 2003b).

The Sources of Responsibility Attributions

We next examine the determinants of responsibility attributions. Are certain individuals more likely to assign credit or blame to certain targets? To address this question, we combine respondents in TESS Groups 2 and 4 to estimate a model of multinomial choice with five response options.¹⁷ We model responsibility attributions as a function of those factors highlighted above: partisanship, age, and knowledge level. The equation we use for this purpose is

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Pr}(\text{Attribute Responsibility to Target})_i = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Partisanship}_i + \beta_2 \text{AgeCohort}_i + \\ & \beta_3 \text{Knowledge}_i + \beta_4 \Delta \text{Unemployment}_j + \\ & \beta_5 \text{Partisanship}_i * \Delta \text{Unemployment}_j + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where the i denotes an individual TESS respondent who resides in state j , the β 's are coefficients we estimate and ε_i is the error term. *Partisanship* is the standard seven-point NES self-identified partisanship scale where 1 equals “Strong Democrat” and 7 equals “Strong Republican.”

AgeCohort is a variable scored 0 for individuals age 39 or younger, 1 for those between 40 and 59 (the modal category), and 2 for those 60 and older. *Knowledge* is a three point scale where 0 is assigned to respondents with a high school degree or less, 1 to respondents with some post-secondary education (the modal category), and 2 to respondents with a college degree or more.¹⁸

As regards the interactive term in (1), recall that we expect Republican partisans and the more informed/knowledgeable respondents to be more likely to attribute responsibility for the national economy to world markets (see H3 and H1, respectively). But partisan rationalization (bias) also is a possibility. Since during the time of our survey the Republican Party controlled both the Presidency and Congress, we might expect, per H4, that Republican partisans are more likely to reward these actors for strong economic performance but less likely to punish them for poor

outcomes. To control for this possibility, as suggested by Gomez and Wilson (2003) and Rudolph (2003b), we model the effect of partisanship to be conditional on economic performance. To capture the notion of the performance of the economy compared with “12 months ago,” we use the change in the unemployment rate in the subject’s state j at the time of the survey (third quarter 2005) relative to the unemployment rate one year previous.¹⁹ This variable, which we call $\Delta Unemployment$, is entered in the model both alone and interacted with *Partisanship*.

Table 3 reports estimates from a multinomial logit model with standard errors clustered by state.²⁰ “The President” is the reference outcome category. The positive and statistically significant coefficients on *Partisanship* for columns 3 and 4 indicate that Republicans (respondents with high values on the *Partisanship* scale) are more likely than Democratic identifiers to attribute responsibility to business people and to national and international business cycles relative to the President. Estimates reported in Table 3 also indicate that older respondents are less likely to credit or blame “working people” relative to the president; and that the more educated are more likely to attribute responsibility to “business people” and to business cycles vis-à-vis the chief executive.

<Table 3 about here>

To more fully assess the effects of these variables, Table 4 reports expected choice probabilities for a hypothetical respondent possessing mean or modal values on the explanatory variables.²¹ Expected probabilities show that Republican identifiers are far more likely to attribute responsibility to markets and market actors than any other target. Strong Republicans (*Partisanship* = 7) attribute responsibility to national and international business cycles with probability .41 and to business people with probability .33. Among solid Republican partisans,

the propensity to assign responsibility to the President is just .08. This result is particularly notable when we recall that the President at the time, George W. Bush, was Republican *and* that most Republican partisans approved of Bush's performance on the economy (see below). Strong Democrats, on the other hand, assign responsibility to the chief executive with a much higher—and statistically significantly different—probability of .42. In contrast, they are less likely than Republicans to identify either business people or market forces as responsible for economic performance.²² In sum, consistent with H3, Democrats are much more willing to hold the President accountable for economic performance than Republicans.

<Table 4 about here>

Table 4 also provides insights into the impact of age and knowledge on responsibility attributions. First differences reveal that age cohort has no statistically significant bearing on placement of credit or blame. Knowledge levels, however, matter and do so in ways consistent with H1. Compared to those with low knowledge, high-knowledge individuals are more likely to attribute responsibility for the economy to national and international business cycles and business people and less likely to identify elected officials (Congress and the President) as responsible for policy outcomes.

In showing that the propensity to attribute economic conditions to national and international markets is substantial in magnitude and varies with individual attributes, these results provide grounds for questioning the received wisdom in political economy that all citizens recognize and appreciate the room to maneuver. In particular, we find that partisan attachments strongly influences the assignment of policy responsibility.²³

Partisan rationalization, however, remains a possibility. Republicans may not be as willing to assign responsibility for the economy to a Republican President if they believe the

economy is performing poorly (H4). We have reason, however, to question the influence of such partisan rationalization. For one, when our survey was in the field, most Republican partisans did not think the economy was performing poorly. Quite the contrary: According to a *ABC/Washington Post* poll in the field during December 2005, 77% of Republican partisans—but only 17% of Democratic partisans—said the state of the nation’s economy was either “good” or “excellent.” Moreover, fully 84% of Republican identifiers approved of the way Bush was handling the economy.

Our interactive specification provides us with additional results about the rationalization claim. If rationalization is at work, then Republicans should be more (less) likely to assign responsibility to their President (and/or to the Republican-controlled Congress) in those places where economic conditions have improved (declined). We find, however, that state-level changes in unemployment levels have no effect on the propensity of Republican (or Democratic) partisans to attribute responsibility to elected officials. In support of this conclusion, Figure 1 displays results of two additional post-estimation analyses using estimates from Table 3. Figure 1A charts the expected probabilities of attributing responsibility to the President as the economy goes from *worsening* conditions ($\Delta Unemployment$ equal its mean plus one standard deviation, or +.13) to *improving* conditions ($\Delta Unemployment$ value set to mean minus one standard deviation, or -.86) for a strong Republican and for a strong Democrat. If the partisan rationalization claim were true, strong Republicans should increase their likelihood of assigning responsibility (credit) to President Bush as economic conditions improve and strong Democrats should be less likely to do so. Figure 1A gives no indication this is the case; if anything we see the opposite.²⁴ Figure 1B reports the difference in assigning credit or blame to the President affected by a two-standard deviation change in $\Delta Unemployment$ (from one standard deviation below the mean to one

standard deviation above it). If partisanship's influence is conditioned by economic performance, then the difference in responsibility attribution probabilities should be non-zero. Results, however, show this not to be the case.

< Figure 1 About Here >

These (non)findings are consistent with Gomez and Wilson's (2003) analysis of partisanship, subjective economic evaluations, and responsibility attributions whereby they conclude from their analyses of 1998 survey data that "Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to see President Clinton as primarily responsible...for the general state of the economy." Even though there was a Republican president during our study, our analysis shows, consistent with H3, that Democrats were still more likely than Republicans to place primary responsibility for the economy on the President.²⁵ In short, partisan influences—and not considerations of the performance of the economy at the time—have direct bearing on Republican partisans' propensity to assign responsibility to market actors and forces rather than to elected officials.

The International Economy and Perceptions of Policy Efficacy

Survey evidence from Europe indicates that large segments of the public doubt their governments have much capacity to influence their economies. Recall that to determine how Americans respond to questions of government capacity, we randomly assigned the second half of our sample to one of four additional groups, TESS Groups 5-8 (see Table 1). As described in above, subjects in Groups 5 and 6 were asked for their perception of "how much influence the American government has on America's economy." Groups 7 and 8 were asked their thoughts regarding the extent to which the American government can keep prices down, reduced

unemployment, and help laid-off workers. As before, some subjects received a world economy prime (Groups 6 and 8) and others did not (Groups 5 and 7).

These results are reported in Tables 5 and 6. Priming again appears to have little effect. Adding a reference to the world economy in the “how much influence” question decreased the frequency of the “A Great Deal” response given by TESS Group 6. A χ^2 test for differences between Group 6’s responses and those of Group 5, however, is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.281, p = 0.233$). Perhaps more important, however, is the comparison with both TESS groups to the 2001 BEPS results. As shown in Table 5, American respondents are much more convinced than their British counterparts that their government still has the capacity to influence the economy; 90% of those American groups respond positively to this question compared to only 53% of British respondents.

<Tables 5 and 6 about here>

Turning to the replication of the British Social Survey item, responses regarding the government’s ability to keep prices down, reduce unemployment, and help workers are very similar across TESS Groups 7 and 8 (see Table 6). There appears some evidence of question wording effects on the unemployment item. Adding the reference to the world economy increases the percent of respondents who answer “Very Little” from 32% to 41%. However, a test for differences in the responses of the two groups is not statistically significant.²⁶ Once again, there is no evidence that priming affects respondents views about the capacity of American governments to help displaced workers. A majority of respondents in these groups believe U.S. policymakers have this capacity.

Results from these responsibility attributions experiments suggest that Americans are more willing to assign responsibility for policy outcomes to elected officials compared to publics

in some European democracies.²⁷ Considering the United States' large domestic market, and considering the growth of regional economic integration in Europe, this result may not be a surprise. Yet, we also find that a sizable minority of Americans believe there is little their governments can do to influence market outcomes. About four in ten respondents in these TESS groups claim there is “very little” the American government can do to affect prices or unemployment levels. And, when given the option, fully one-third of respondents identify national and international business cycles—not public- or private-sector actors—as chiefly responsible for national economic conditions.

Who Thinks Government's Hands are Tied? Modeling the Non-Belief in the Room to Maneuver

Our fourth analysis examines the determinants of individual perceptions of the room to maneuver while taking into account the possibility of partisan motivated reasoning. For this purpose we estimate a binary choice model to predict the probability that a respondent is a nonbeliever (1) or a believer in the room to maneuver (0):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Pr}(\text{Non-Belief in Room to Maneuver})_i = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Partisanship}_i + \beta_2 \text{AgeCohort}_i + & (2) \\ & \beta_3 \text{Knowledge}_i + \beta_4 \text{Partisanship}_i * \text{AgeCohort}_i + \\ & \beta_5 \text{Partisanship}_i * \text{Knowledge}_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

where i again denotes an individual TESS subject, *Partisanship*, *Age Cohort*, and *Knowledge* are measured as previously noted. The β s are parameters to be estimated and ε_i is a disturbance term. To account for the possibility that a subject's assignment to this “nonbeliever” group is affected by the questions they randomly heard in part I of the experiment (see top half of Table 1), we also included dummy variables for membership in TESS groups 3, 4, and 8 with TESS group 6 as the reference category.

We expect $\beta_1 > 0$, such that Republicans are more likely to be non-believers (H3). The coefficient on the *Partisanship*Knowledge* interaction allows us to examine partisan biases in greater detail. If $\beta_5 < 0$, then the positive association between Republicans and non-beliefs are strongest among low-information respondents. In other words, partisanship serves as cognitive shortcut. On the other hand, if $\beta_5 > 0$, then information amplifies partisan biases—individuals use their knowledge about how the world works to link partisan sentiment to perceptions of policymaker efficacy. Finally, to the extent that cohort effects reflect beliefs in the Keynesian folklore (H5), the coefficient on *Partisanship* interacted with *AgeCohort* (β_4) should be greater than zero, suggesting that beliefs in the room to maneuver are most polarized between older partisans.²⁸

Probit model estimates are reported in Table 7. The first model presents an equation without the interaction terms. The results are consistent with those of our earlier analysis. The probability of being a *Non-Believer* is higher for Republican identifiers and for subjects having greater levels of knowledge (education). The coefficient on *AgeCohort* is positive, though not statistically significant. Model 2 analyzes the effect of partisanship conditioned on age and knowledge, as specified in equation (2). As Ai and Norton (2003) and Brambor et al. (2006) have shown, t-statistics should not be used to assess the statistical significance of coefficients on interaction terms.²⁹ We therefore report results in terms of predicted probabilities by iteratively setting variable values to their modal values and varying *Partisanship* as a way to test expectations regarding the conditional effect of partisan bias on room to maneuver beliefs. We perform this exercise four times, corresponding the cases of high and low knowledge levels and membership in the oldest and youngest age cohorts.

<Table 7 and Figure 2 about here>

Figures 2A through 2D display the results. First consider the role of respondent knowledge levels. A comparison of the top two figures reaffirms the finding that Republicans are more apt to be *Non-Believers*. This relationship, however, holds only for respondents with high levels of knowledge (Figure 2A). Among those with low knowledge levels, Republicans are no more likely to be non-believers than Democrats (Figure 2B). This result supports H1, that information serves to enhance partisan biases pertaining to perceptions of the room to maneuver. It further suggests, that some minimal level of knowledge may be required to be persuaded by political elites when it comes to the issue of government policy efficacy. The bottom two figures assess the role of partisan socialization. Using age cohort as a proxy for familiarity with the folklore of Keynesianism, recall that our expectation in H5 is that older Democrats ought to be the least likely to perceive no room to maneuver.³⁰ Figures 2C and 2D provide some support for this hypothesis: among older respondents, the model yields the expected result that strong Democrats are more likely to believe in the room to maneuver and strong Republicans are likely to be non-believers (Figure 2C). However, for the youngest cohort (those born in 1966 or later) there is no relationship between partisanship and beliefs in the room to maneuver.

To distinguish among these knowledge and cohort effects, Table 8 considers the attitudes only of those at the extremes of the partisan spectrum, strong Democrats and strong Republicans. It reports the estimated probability of being a non-believer for each combination of high/low knowledge and old/young cohort. There are few differences among strong Democrats. Neither factor has much of an effect on propensities to recognize constraints on policy efficacy, though there is some evidence to suggest that knowledgeable young respondents are more likely to do so. The picture is different when we look at strong Republicans. In particular, the difference in

attitudes among high knowledge, old cohort respondents and low knowledge, young cohort respondents is striking – the former are much more likely to be non-believers than the latter.

<Table 8 about here>

We found that while Americans believe that their government retains the capacity to make effective policies, there exists a substantial minority which thinks otherwise. A key question for a substantive form of representative democracy in the United States therefore is, How will this minority evolve in the face of increased international market integration? With deregulation, the growth of world markets, and so on, will the share of non-believers in the United States increase in the future?³¹ Though data limitations prevent us from drawing firm conclusions, our results are suggestive. The top row of Table 8 shows that among older Americans less-informed Democrats are the least likely to be non-believers. It is possible therefore that doubts about government capacity will become more and more prevalent as this cohort is replaced by younger partisans. This is especially true to the extent that many (most) younger Democrats are from middle- and upper- class, more educated backgrounds. Thus, with the anticipation of generational replacement, the size of the group of Americans that (still) believe in the room to maneuver may shrink as time goes on. The consequences of an eventual “non-believing majority” for American democracy deserve the attention of future research.

Conclusion

This paper shows that, in contrast to many Europeans, a substantial number of Americans believe that their government has the capacity to influence macroeconomic outcomes. Democratic partisans and the less educated stand out in this regard. Republican identifiers and the more educated citizens not only see national and international market forces as more

influential on macroeconomic outcomes, they actually prefer it this way. In their mind, national and international market forces discipline governments. These different beliefs about the room to maneuver are likely to become the bases of new electoral cleavages and future policy debates. Students of American electoral behavior and political economy must become more attuned the implications of this heterogeneity.

Our results speak to the central role of economic evaluations in mass politics in the United States. The workhorse model of electoral accountability asserts that when economic conditions deteriorate, the public holds the government responsible and removes the executive from office. However, in order for this sanctioning device to work, people must first believe that it is the government's job to ensure a stable and buoyant national economy. This point has not been lost on students of political behavior (Peffley 1985; Peffley and Williams 1985; Rudolph 2003b). Anderson (2007, 289) has recently criticized the practice among scholars of equating economic voting with accountability model, asking whether it is useful to expect that politicians can affect economic performance. Yet we find that economic conditions continue to matter in American elections—the economy matters for voting and other forms of political participation because, as we show, a many citizens still believe in the American government's capacity to influence the open economy. However, by emphasizing the power of national and international business cycles, elites may be able to convince some citizens that they are not responsible for economic performance.³²

Our investigation raises at least two important topics for future research. The first is to more fully chart and then explain the contrasts between American and European beliefs about the room to maneuver. The first task would be to show that priming also is not a factor in the European setting: for example, that the high level of *non*-belief in the room to maneuver

observed in Britain, France, and other European countries is not an outgrowth of the wordings of the questions used by the survey organizations; rather these questions tap genuine attitudes about government capacity. If this proves to be the case, we need to learn if it is the right-leaning, more educated Europeans who tend not to believe in the room to maneuver, and if they too believe in the idea of national and international market discipline. In order to provide policy prescriptions, it is also essential to learn whether the relative size and economic strength of countries like the U.S. produce greater propensities to believe in the room to maneuver compared to mass publics in smaller countries such as Austria or Denmark (Christensen 2003).

This brings us to the second, and more complex, issue of partisan bias. Are the links we uncovered between partisanship and beliefs in the room to maneuver the result of motivated perception (reasoning) or of accurate assessments of the situation faced by governments? As we noted, the literature on Americans' evaluations of economic policy and performance yield conflicting results. In fact, a well-established line of work in economics argues that monetary policy innovations have little impact on the real economy; any impact occurs only through the "systematic part" of such policies. This systematic part normally is represented in monetary policy reaction function. But even then, much of the variance in output, jobs and other variables is due to things like technological change and not to monetary policy. And, of course, economists do not include a variable for popular evaluations of macroeconomic outcomes in these reaction functions.³³ The relevant political science research falls into two camps. One emphasizes political accountability in *nonelectoral* periods; it links policy and economic variables to support for incumbents over time. But this research never attempts to show that there are causal links from popular support for incumbents to policy choices to economic outcomes and back to popular support. The other genre focuses on electorally induced fiscal cycles. But in emphasizing

how contextual conditions like trade openness and policy transparency mute such cycles, this work rarely analyzes how (if) electorally induced policies affect real macroeconomies. So there is little evidence to date that government actually is held accountable for its policies and that those policies have significant and permanent effects on the real economy. Until this evidence is produced, we will not know which of the perceptions illuminated in this paper are biased by partisan screens or whether they reflect accurate assessments of policymakers' capacity to manage open economies.³⁴

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Table 1. Summary of Experimental Design

Stage 1: The Responsibility Attribution Experiment: The effects of wording and question itemization^a

Part I: Responsibility for the economy

TESS Groups 1 & 2	NES responsibility attribution question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With and without business cycle response option Item from <i>Wall Street Journal</i>/NBC Survey
TESS Groups 3 & 4	Primed American National Election Study responsibility attribution question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With and without business cycle response option from <i>WSJ</i>/NBC survey

Part II: Policymaking Capacity

TESS Groups 5 & 6	Modified British Election Panel Study question on government influence in national economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With and without prime for world economy
TESS Groups 7 & 8	Modified British SSLT Three-part question on government capacity to affect prices, general unemployment levels, and trade-induced job loss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With and without prime for world economy

Stage 2: The Room to Maneuver Experiment: Reasoning and Identity of Believers and Non-Believers in the Room to Maneuver

Part I: Believers

Subjects selected from Groups 1-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of beliefs regarding room to maneuver • Satisfaction with parties • Satisfaction with technocracy and democracy
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Part II: Non-Believers

Subjects selected from Groups 1-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of beliefs regarding room to maneuver • Satisfaction with parties • Satisfaction with technocracy and democracy
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^a Assignment of subjects to groups in Stage 1 is random; each subject was assigned to only one of these eight groups.

Table 2. Responsibility Attributions for National Economic Conditions

	ANES 1998 N = 1121	TESS Group 1 N = 74	TESS Group 2 (Fifth Option) N = 56	TESS Group 3 (Prime) N = 64	TESS Group 4 (Fifth Option & Prime) N = 60
Congress	30.5	33.8	16.1	32.3	13.3
President	21.5	31.1	19.6	21.5	23.3
Working People	16.1	6.8	10.7	9.4	6.7
Business People	31.8	28.4	17.8	35.9	25.0
Nat'l & Int'l Business Cycles	NA	NA	35.7	NA	31.7

Sources: 1998 American National Election Study and 2005-06 TESS Study.

Note: Cells report percentages. Respondents who refused to answer, who answered “Don’t know,” or who volunteered other responses are not reported. This equaled less than two percent of TESS respondents.

Table 3. Multinomial Logit Estimates of Responsibility Attributions

	Congress / President	Working People / President	Business People / President	National & Int'l Business Cycles/ President
Partisanship	.159 (.179)	.176 (.168)	.382* (.200)	.262* (.151)
Age Cohort	-.585 (.524)	-1.109* (.595)	-.480 (.432)	-.513 (.389)
Knowledge	-.373 (.379)	.354 (.370)	.782** (.304)	.666** (.251)
Δ Unemployment	.170 (1.264)	1.532 (1.274)	.519 (1.319)	1.092 (1.104)
PID x Δ Unemployment	-.140 (.216)	-.572** (.282)	-.271 (.348)	-.291 (.263)
Constant	-.257 (1.273)	-1.165 (.903)	-1.959** (.892)	-.613 (.846)
N	112			
Wald χ^2 statistic	99.53**			
Pseudo R2	0.10			

Source: 2005-06 TESS study

Note: Data are from TESS Groups 2 and 4. Cells report multinomial logit estimates with standard errors clustered according to state in parentheses. The President is the reference category. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, 2-tailed test

Table 4. Expected Probabilities of Responsibility Attributions

	Congress	President	Working People	Business People	National and Int'l Business Cycles
<i>Partisanship</i>					
Strong Republican	.09** (.03)	.08** (.04)	.10** (.05)	.33** (.06)	.41** (.07)
Strong Democrat	.16** (.08)	.42** (.10)	.06 (.05)	.11* (.05)	.26** (.08)
First Difference	-.07 (.10)	-.34** (.11)	.04 (.07)	.21** (.10)	.15 (.12)
<i>Age</i>					
Youngest Cohort (≤ 39 years)	.15** (.07)	.13** (.05)	.15** (.06)	.21** (.07)	.37** (.08)
Oldest Cohort (≥ 60 years)	.11** (.05)	.31** (.09)	.05 (.03)	.21** (.07)	.32** (.08)
First Difference	.04 (.10)	-.18 (.11)	.10 (.07)	.01 (.12)	.04 (.13)
<i>Knowledge</i>					
Low (≤ high school degree)	.25** (.06)	.28** (.08)	.08** (.04)	.14** (.05)	.25** (.07)
High (≥ 4-yr college degree)	.06* (.03)	.13** (.03)	.07** (.03)	.30** (.06)	.44** (.07)
First Difference	.19** (.07)	.15* (.08)	.01 (.05)	-.16* (.09)	-.18** (.09)

Note: Table entries are the expected probabilities of each responsibility attribution given specified row variable with standard errors in parentheses. Cell entries are obtained by manipulating the value of the row variable while holding all other variable values to the following: *Partisanship* = 4 (Independent), *Age Cohort* = 1 (40-59 years), *Knowledge* = 1 (some post-secondary education), and $\Delta Unemployment$ at its in-sample mean. Using CLARIFY (King et al 2000), we then calculate the mean and standard deviation of the predicted probabilities by taking 1000 draws from the multivariate normal distribution of the estimated parameters from Table 3. ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Table 5. Influence of Government on National Economy

	BEPS 2001 (Prime) N = 2333	TESS Group 5 (No prime) N = 71	TESS Group 6 (Prime) N = 61
A Great Deal	9.0	47.9	32.8
Quite A Lot	44.4	42.3	57.4
Not Very Much	38.2	8.5	9.8
Hardly Any	5.2	1.4	-
Don't Know	3.1	-	-

Sources: 2001 British Election Panel Study and 2005-06 TESS Study

Note: Cells report percentages. The BEPS question wording is, "In today's world-wide economy, how much influence do you think British governments have on the Britain's economy." Both TESS groups were asked about the influence of the American government on America's economy. TESS Group 6 heard the same wording used the British survey. The prime "In today's world-wide economy" was omitted from the question posed to the individuals in TESS Group 5.

Table 6. Effectiveness of Government's Economic Policy

Ability of Government to:		BSS 1986	TESS Group 7	TESS Group 8
		(No prime)	(No prime)	(prime)
		N = 1000	N = 63	N = 59
Keep prices down	Quite A Bit	62.0	60.3	61.0
	Very Little	33.0	39.7	39.0
	Don't Know	5.0	-	-
Reduce unemployment	Quite A Bit	61.0	68.3	59.3
	Very Little	34.0	31.7	40.7
	Don't Know	5.0	-	-
Help workers	Quite A Bit	-	76.2	71.2
	Very Little	-	23.8	28.8
	Don't Know	-	-	-

Sources: 1986 British Social Survey and 2005-06 TESS Study

Notes: Cells report percentages. The size of the British survey is given as approximate; the percents for the BSS column therefore also are approximate. The question used in the British Social Survey is, "Some people say that British Governments nowadays—of whichever party—can actually do very little to change things. Others say they can do quite a bit. Do you think that British governments nowadays can do very little or quite a bit: to keep prices down, to reduce unemployment, to reduce taxes, to improve the general standard of living, to improve the health and social services and to control wages and salary increases." For the TESS study, we only asked about prices and unemployment and added an additional item, "World trade causes some American workers to lose their jobs. Do you think the American government can do very little or quite a bit to help these workers?" For both TESS groups respondents were asked about the capacity of American governments to achieve these three outcomes. The wording for TESS Group 7 was otherwise identical to the BSS. TESS Group 8 was primed with the opening: "Some people say that because of the influence of the world economy..."

Table 7. Probit Model for Non-Believers in Room to Maneuver

	Model 1	Model 2
Partisanship (high = Republican)	.101** (.042)	-.070 (.107)
Age Cohort	.143 (.122)	-.174 (.250)
Knowledge	.309** (.110)	.039** (.230)
Partisanship x Age Cohort		.083 (.057)
Partisanship x Knowledge		.070 (.052)
Group 3	1.875** (.248)	1.904** (.252)
Group 4	2.366** (.257)	2.428** (.265)
Group 8	1.340** (.303)	1.346** (.307)
Constant	-2.866** (.345)	-2.237** (.487)
LR χ^2 statistic	148.27**	151.32**
Pseudo R ²	.38	.38
N	375	375

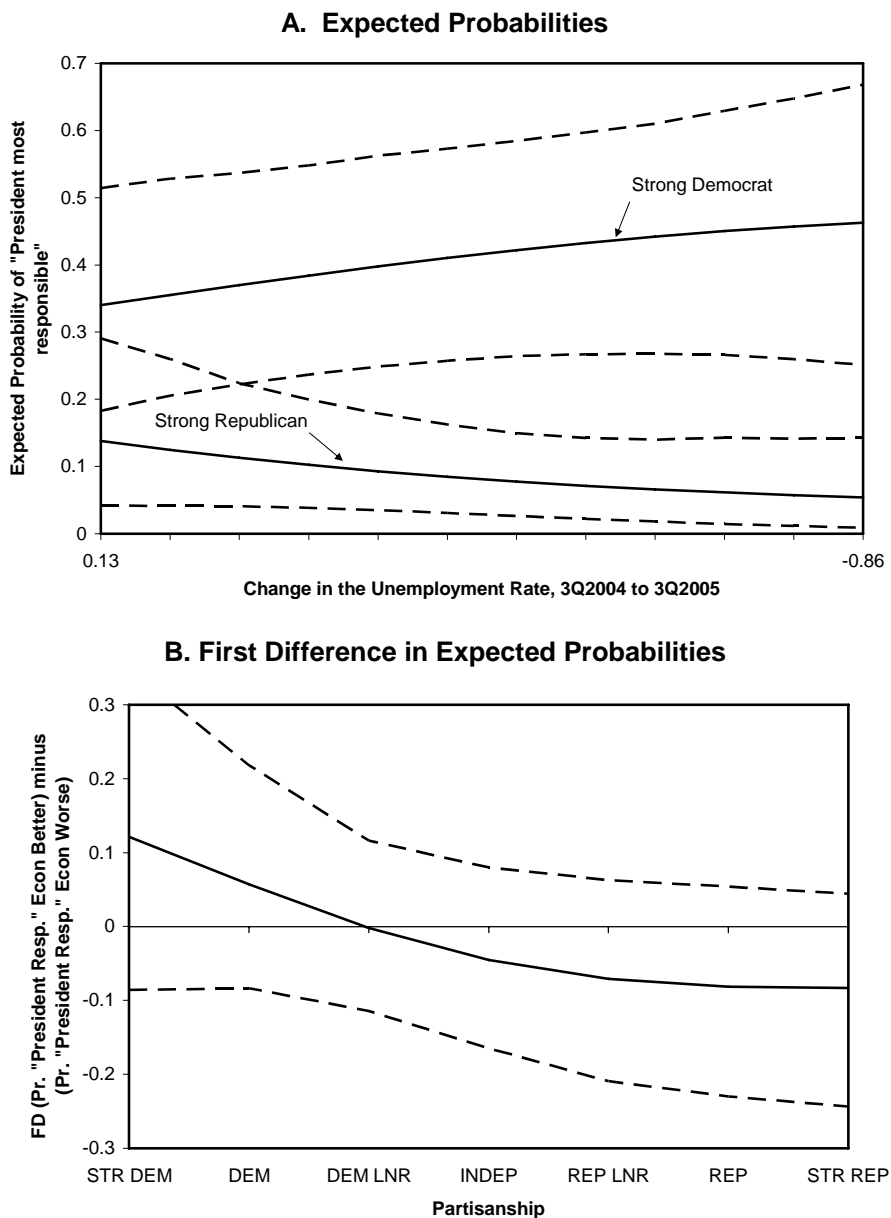
Note: Dependent variable equals 1 for Non-Believers in Room to Maneuver and 0 for Believers in Room to Maneuver. Figures in parentheses report robust standard errors. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, two-tailed test.

Table 8. Probability of being a Non-Believer in the Room to Maneuver among Strong Partisans

	Strong Democrats			Strong Republicans	
	High knowledge	Low knowledge		High knowledge	Low knowledge
Old cohort	.199 [.053, .404]	.140 [.042, .280]	Old cohort	.673 [.438, .870]	.293 [.113, .524]
Young cohort	.245 [.090, .449]	.186 [.048, .391]	Young cohort	.382 [.180, .612]	.106 [.014, .275]

Note: Cells report predicted probabilities using estimates from Table 7, Model 2. 90% confidence intervals are in brackets. We use CLARIFY (King *et al.* 2000) to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the predicted probabilities by taking 1000 draws from the multivariate normal distribution of the estimated parameters from Table 7, Model 2.

Figure 1. Assessing Partisan Rationalizations: Effect of Unemployment Rate on Expected Probability of Attributing Responsibility to the President

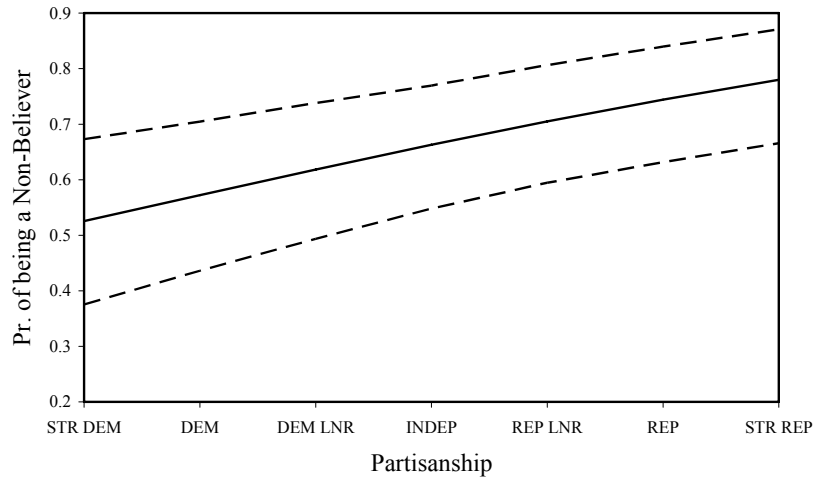


Note: Figure 1A graphs the expected probability that a Strong Democrat (Partisanship = 1) and Strong Republican (Partisanship = 7) attribute responsibility for economic conditions mainly to the president as $\Delta Unemployment$ runs from one standard deviation above its sample mean (+.13, meaning that the unemployment rate rose in the state from the third quarter of 2004 to the third quarter of 2005) to one standard deviation below the mean (-.86, meaning that the jobless rate declined). Figure 1B compares the change in the expected probabilities of attributing responsibility to the president that the respondent comparing the case where $\Delta Unemployment$ is one standard deviation below its mean (-.86) to one standard deviation above (+.13). Expected probabilities and first differences are those for a respondent with *Age Cohort* = 1 (40-59 years)

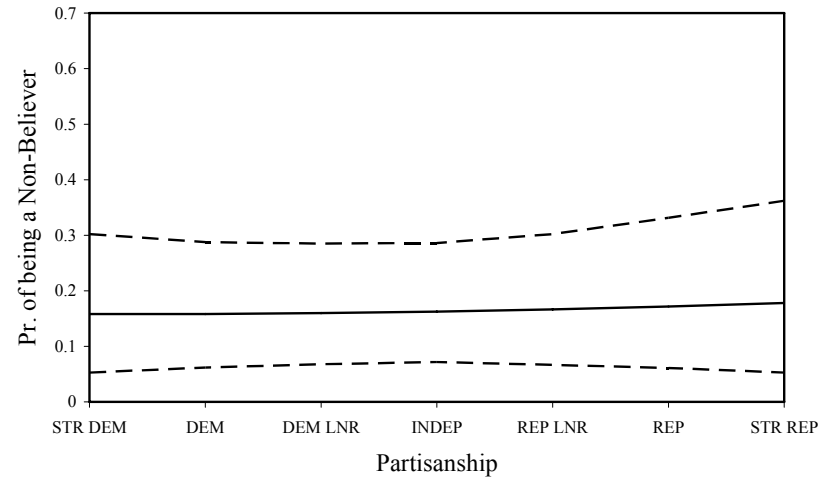
and *Knowledge* = 1 (some post-secondary education). Dashed lines report 90% confidence intervals, as produced by CLARIFY (King et al 2000) using estimated parameters from Table 3.

Figure 2. Partisanship and Room to Maneuver Beliefs: The Conditional Effects of Knowledge and Age Cohort

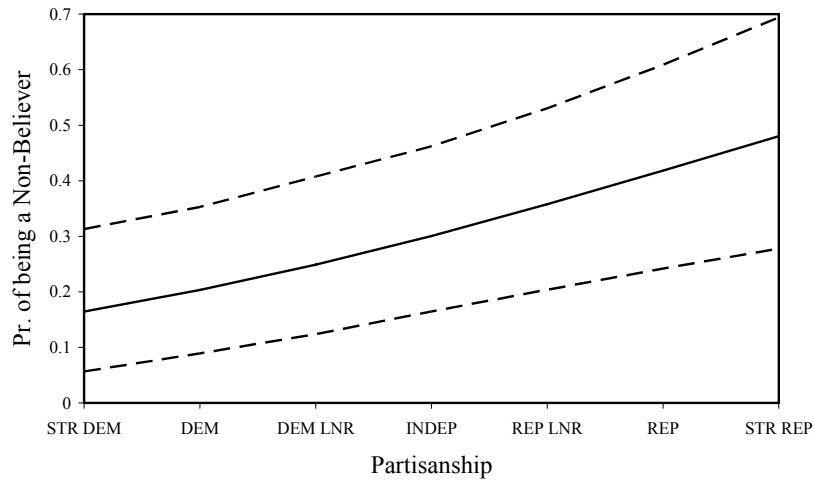
A: High Knowledge and the Room to Maneuver



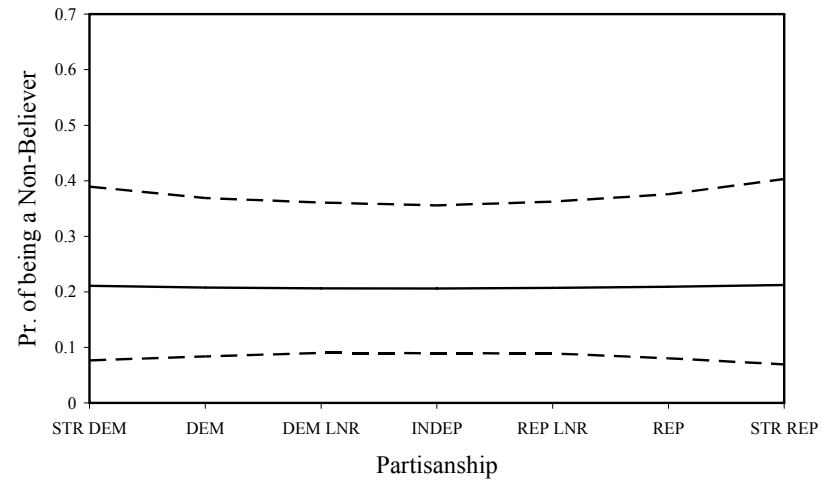
B. Low Knowledge and the Room to Maneuver



C. Age and the Room to Maneuver: Older Cohort



D. Age and the Room to Maneuver: Younger Cohort



Note: Figures graph report predicted probabilities using estimates from Table 7, Model 2. Unless otherwise indicated, variables are set to their mean or modal values. Dashed lines report 90% confidence intervals. We use CLARIFY (King *et al.* 2000) to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the predicted probabilities by taking 1000 draws from the multivariate normal distribution of the estimated parameters from Table 7, Model 2.

Endnotes

¹For instance, in the United States, Republican politicians have often been seen as more concerned with—and therefore more competent at—creating a stable environment for investment than Democrats (Petrocik 1996).

² See also Bartels' (2002, 133ff) investigation of how Republican and Democratic identifiers evaluate unemployment and inflation performance under Reagan.

³ The telephone time for the module was awarded to Freeman. The survey data were collected by Time Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences (TESS), NSF Grant 0094964, Diana C. Mutz and Arthur Lupia Investigators, Project #410. The TESS data and report can be found at www.experimentcentral.org/data. The full questionnaire can be found in our Appendix.

⁴ See Table A1 in our Appendix for a comparison between the TESS sample and the national population in January 2006.

⁵ In this way, we inquire as to whether changes in wording or in the closed-ended response options causes respondents to select different options (see, e.g., Druckman 2001).

⁶ The NBC/WSJ poll was conducted by Hart and Teeter Research Companies between January 13 and 15 in 2001. The question was: “Through much of the 1990s, America enjoyed a strong economy. Which one of the following do you think was most responsible for the economy’s success? Productivity of businesses and workers, the Clinton administration, Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve, the national and international business cycles, or the Republican Congress’ policies?” We added only the item about national and international business cycles to the list in the ANES attribution of responsibility question. It should be emphasized that we retained the language of “*who* is most responsible” despite the inanimate nature of markets. We did this for reasons of consistency and to avoid priming respondents to think about inanimate forces more than they otherwise would.

⁷ The questions are included in our Appendix. Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4 were assigned randomly to questions 1.11, 1.12, 1.21, and 1.22, respectively.

⁸ For use in the TESS experiment, we changed all references to “Britain” or “British” to “America” or “American.”

⁹ Groups 5, 6, 7, and 8 were randomly assigned to questions 1.31, 1.32, 1.41 and 1.42 respectively (see our Appendix).

¹⁰ As regards Groups 7 and 8, by affirmative, we mean gave the answer “Quite a bit” to one or all three parts *and* otherwise did not reply “Very little” to any part of these questions (to the parts not answered “Quite a bit,” a “Don’t Know” response was permissible for assignment to the *Believers in Room to Maneuver* group).

¹¹ At the time the experiment was designed, it was not clear that priming would have little effect. To ensure that its composition was not an artifact of question wording, the *Non-Believer* subset was constructed only from groups who received questions that referenced the world economy.

¹² For a member of Group 8 to be assigned to the non-believer subset, she would have to answer “Very little” to all three parts or else answer “Very little” only one or two of the parts with a “Don’t Know” response for the remaining part(s).

¹³ This design produces a conservative estimate of the proportion of the American public who does not believe in the room to maneuver. We have reason to expect that the segment of the public that perceives elected officials as having little to no policy room to maneuver will grow in the future. Findings from relatively more open economies, such as Britain and France, support this expectation. Results using an alternative classification of subjects are very similar. See our Appendix.

¹⁴ By “tailored” we mean a pair of questions based on the knowledge that they had been assigned as a result of their response in the first stage of the experiment to either the believer or non-believer group. (See in our Appendix Questions 2.11 and 2.13; Questions 2.21 and 2.23)

¹⁵ To prevent any response ordering effects from systematically biasing the results, the order in which response options were presented to subjects was randomized for the attribution questions. To test for ordering effects, we conducted difference of means tests comparing the mean response to the responsibility attribution question for respondents who received the business cycles option first to the mean response to the same question for the rest of the sample ($t = -0.513, p = 0.608$), the mean for respondents who received the business cycles option last to the mean for the remaining respondents ($t = 0.535, p = 0.593$), and the mean for respondents who received the business cycles option first or last with the mean for those who received it second, third, or fourth ($t = 0.004, p = 0.997$). None of the three comparisons are statistically significant, indicating that the randomization of the response options was effective in preventing systematic bias. We also performed a cross-tabulation of question responses about who is responsible for economic conditions and whether they received the “national and international business cycles” option first, fifth, or second through fourth. The resulting chi-square statistic failed to reject the null, which again suggests that the randomization of the response options was effective and did not systematically bias respondents' answers ($\chi^2 = 7.99, p = 0.435$).

¹⁶ A χ^2 test reveals that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the economic globalization prime and the results to the ANES attribution question with four response options in Groups 1 and 3 ($\chi^2 = 2.00, p\text{-value} = 0.571$). Similarly, a χ^2 test with Groups 2 and 4 (with five response options, including “national and international business cycles”) fails to reject the null, thereby again suggesting that the prime had no effect ($\chi^2 = 1.709, p\text{-value} = 0.789$).

¹⁷ We also estimated a four-choice model which excludes the “national and international business cycles” option. These coefficient estimates are reported in our Appendix.

¹⁸ Following Zaller (1992), we rely on education since TESS experiment did not include a battery of objective information items.

¹⁹For each TESS subject, we used data on respondent zip code to matched state unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. We considered several other variables, including age, gender, income, occupational status, and ideology, but found that they did not affect parameter estimates or model fit. We also included a dummy variable indicating whether or not responses of subjects in Group 4 (who received the world economy prime) differed from those of the subjects in Group 2 (who did not). Once again, the use of these alternative specifications and measures did not change the results reported in the text. Accordingly, we followed Achen’s (2002) advice and kept the number of our independent variables to a minimum.

²⁰ Multinomial logit (MNL) makes the assumption of the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA). To test this assumption, we performed seemingly unrelated estimation tests, a generalization of the Hausman test which relaxes the assumption of no correlation between the unrestricted and restricted estimates and therefore is appropriate for small sample sizes. To perform the test we first estimate the full unrestricted MNL model and retain parameter estimates. We then exclude one of the response options and reestimate the model and again retain parameter estimates. Finally, a hypothesis test is conducted to assess whether the coefficients vary statistically across the two models. The null hypothesis is that the MNL coefficients are statistically indistinguishable across the two models, suggesting that IIA holds. The alternative hypothesis is that the MNL coefficients are statistically different when one

category of the dependent variable is excluded, suggesting a violation of IIA. We fail to reject the null hypothesis in all cases.

²¹ This means that the respondent is a political independent, 40 to 59 years old who possesses some post-secondary education and lives in a state which experienced average (mean) change in its unemployment rate over the past 12 months.

²² Compare this to the case the 4-choice model probabilities (see our Appendix, Table A3), where strong Democrats are predicted to assign responsibility for the economy to business people with a probability of .30, second only to their propensity to select the president (.45). The “national and international business cycles” response option leads us to draw new conclusions for how partisanship structures one’s belief which actors influence policy outcomes.

²³ This conclusion stands when we estimate a model using data from subjects receiving the four-response attributions item (TESS Groups 1 and 3). See our Appendix, Tables A1 and A2.

²⁴ That is, Democrats say “President” with increasing probability as economy improves. This change is not statistically significant, however, as Figure 1B shows.

²⁵ We also examined expected probabilities and first differences for attributing responsibility to the Republican-controlled Congress and arrived at results similar to what we report here pertaining to the President.

²⁶ This is true of all three sets of questions for Groups 7 and 8. For prices: $\chi^2 = 0.0062$, p -value = 0.937; for unemployment: $\chi^2 = 1.054$, p -value = 0.305; for worker aid: $\chi^2 = 0.394$, p -value = 0.530.

²⁷ In fact, the American public may lie somewhere in between citizens of these developed welfare states and publics in less-developed democracies. Duckett and Miller (2006) report that about 70% of publics in Vietnam, South Korea, Ukraine, and Czech Republic say that economic

trends are due to domestic factors, while less than 20% identify “foreign businesses and international organizations” as mainly responsible. Duckett and Miller do not ask respondents about the effect of business cycles, however.

²⁸ This should be qualified somewhat, since our strongest expectation applies to Democrats of the post-war generation. It is not altogether clear that *Republican* members of this cohort are any more likely to be non-believers than younger Republican partisans. Modeling this more specific, more limited expectation would require a more complex specification and would cause us to do away with the standard scalar partisanship measure in order to examine at Democrat and Republicans separately.

²⁹ The interactive effect in a nonlinear model may be statistically significant for most observations, even if the coefficient on the interaction term appears not to be statistically significant (Ai and Norton 2003; Brambor et al. 2006).

³⁰ Given equation (2), a corollary would be that older Republicans would be the most likely to be non-believers.

³¹ Recall that there appears to be far more “non-believers” in other democracies, such as Britain and France.

³² This is not to say that these beliefs are sophisticated. The connection between the room to maneuver and retrospective voting can be based on (Keynesian) folklore. It may amount to little more than “blind retrospection.” On these points see Achen and Bartels (2004; 2006).

³³ For example, the noted empirical macroeconomist, Christopher Sims (2007, 19) explains that the effects of monetary policy—policy based on interest rate adjustments—on prices is “smooth and slow, delayed for a year or before they have peak effects,” whereas the effects on output is “somewhat quicker but less-long lasting.” In both cases, the effect is subject to uncertainty,

hence Sims and others focus on constructing appropriate error bands for the effects that money shocks have on the economy (Sims and Zha 1996). Also, *The Economist* (August 11 2007, 70) points out that rich countries central banks no longer control the world's broad money supply; over the past year 60% of the world's broad money supply has been created by monetary authorities emerging market countries.

³⁴ While levels of unemployment, inflation and deficit can be measured and reported (Bartels 2002; Achen and Bartels 2006), whether there is or is not room to maneuver is a much more challenging question. Two recent studies of the British case—a country with high clarity of responsibility and fiscal transparency—revealed a link between popular evaluations of policy and government policy innovations. But, even though they employ the same method used in modern empirical macroeconomics, these investigations found little impact of the policy innovations on the real economy. They suggest that the people who say governments have little influence over the economy in Britain are accurate (Sattler et al. 2007, forthcoming).