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**The influence of public opinion on policy proposals In
the Field of Political Tolerance**

Abstract

A much debated question is the question whether or not politicians follow public opinion. This research tries to shed light on that question, by investigating if politicians follow the public in the area of political tolerance. However, instead of linking thoughts about political tolerance among the public with thoughts of politicians, this research tries to link thoughts about political tolerance among the public with actions conducted by politicians. In other words, do politicians act more (or less) tolerant when the public is more (or less) tolerant? This question is investigated by doing a content analysis of state of the union addresses. These results are then compared with survey results considering political tolerance among the public to see whether or not there is a relationship between the two variables. After this analysis, it is concluded that the level of political tolerance among the public, and the level of tolerance in actions conducted by politicians are negatively related, where actions by politicians become more (less) tolerant when the public is less (more) tolerant.

Introduction

This research will focus on a relationship between the level of political tolerant thoughts among the public, and the level of political tolerance of political actions among politicians. In other words, do politicians reflect the public when it comes to political tolerance? Hereby this research tries to answer the following question: *Does a more (or less) tolerant public lead to more (or less) tolerant actions by politicians?*

Answering this question is important in several ways. First of all, it shows us whether or not politicians actually do what their voters want. If there is a big discrepancy between the thoughts among the public concerning political tolerance and the actions undertaken by politicians, we can conclude that politicians do not reflect public opinion when it comes to political tolerance. This can lead to debates concerning representative democracy. However, when this research concludes that politicians do follow public opinion, proponents of representative democracy can use this to defend their position. In other words, this research can fuel a debate concerning representative democracy.

This research is also important in that it can show us how political tolerant and political intolerant policies are created. Are they an effect of public opinion, or do they reflect opinions by politicians themselves? Moreover, are shifts in political tolerant and intolerant actions caused by shifts in public opinion, or by shifts in politicians? This research can help to answer these questions and fuel debate in this field.

Another important implication of this research is that it can foster academic debate. This research can shed light on the question whether or not politicians do what the public wants. Some scholars argue that politicians follow public opinion when they propose and implement policies (Page & Shapiro, 1983; Bartels, 1991; Hartley & Russett, 1992; Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson, 1995; Burnstein, 2003; Wlezien, 2004). Hobolt & Klemmensen (2008) argue that the electoral system is of vital importance, and they claim that politicians are mainly responsive in a presidential system like the United States (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). Other scholars, however, argue that politicians do not follow public opinion, but rather that the public follows politicians (Wlezien, 1995; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005). Moreover, some scholars argue that there is no relationship at all between public opinion and actions undertaken by politicians (Petry, 1999; Petry & Medelshon, 2004). This

research will discuss whether or not actions by politicians are influenced by public opinion in one domain, namely political tolerance. By doing this, this research contributed to an ongoing academic debate in this field.

Another important academic debate is the question whether or not politicians are more tolerant than the public. Some scholars argue that the political elite is more supportive of minority rights, and is therefore more political tolerant than the mass (Prothro & Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964; Sullivan *et al*, 1993). Others however, do not agree with this statement. Shamir (1991) for example found that the political elite in Israel does not differ greatly compared to the mass when it comes to political tolerance, whereas other elites were found to be more tolerant than the political elite (Shamir, 1991: 1025 – 1032). Moreover, Jackman (1972) found that political elites do not differ in their opinions concerning minority rights when compared with the public in similar social status groups (Jackman, 1972: 759 – 768).

This shows how scholars disagree on the question whether or not political elites are more tolerant than the public. This research can contribute to this debate by exploring whether or not politicians actually reflect the public when it comes to political tolerance. This will have important implications for the academic debate concerning discrepancies between political tolerance among the mass and among the political elite, as it can show that political tolerance/intolerance is, or is not, caused by moods in the general public.

Moreover, previous research has focused on a link between political tolerant/intolerant thoughts among the public and political tolerant/intolerant thoughts among politicians. This research will focus instead on a link between political tolerant/intolerant thoughts among the public and political tolerant/intolerant actions by politicians. Hereby this research will help fill a gap in the academic literature concerning political tolerance, by linking thoughts with actions. By doing this, this research can open a new debate, as previous research has fostered debate concerning discrepancies between tolerant/intolerant thoughts among the public and political elites, this research is able to open a debate concerning a discrepancy (or no discrepancy) between political tolerant/intolerant thoughts among the public, and political tolerant/intolerant actions conducted by politicians.

Theory

To examine the question: *Does a more (or less) tolerant public lead to more (or less) tolerant actions by politicians?* several aspects have to be investigated. First of all, what is political tolerance. Second, do politicians follow public opinion when they propose and implement policy? . And the last question is: are politicians just as tolerant as the public, or are they somehow more or less tolerant? In other words, do politicians follow the general public on the specific topic of political tolerance, or do they differ from the public on this topic?

Political tolerance

Political tolerance has been defined as the willingness one has to let certain individuals or groups express ideas that one opposes (Sullivan, Piereson & Marcus, 1979: 784). Tolerance, can only exist when one opposes something, as it is the amount of freedom one gives to individuals, groups and ideas one opposes (Sullivan, Piereson & Marcus, 1979: 784). Tolerance should therefore be measured, by measuring how much freedom somebody is willing to give to his/her least liked group (Sullivan, Piereson & Marcus, 1979: 785-786). This shows how political tolerance has to deal with allowing certain controversial ideas, and minorities to express their ideas and enjoy freedom rights. Therefore, it is important to find out whether or not politicians actually follow public opinion when it comes to political tolerance, as it deals with important democratic values such as minority rights. In other words, investigating whether or not politicians follow public opinion when it comes to political tolerance shows us whether or not politicians follow public opinion when it comes to certain core democratic values such as minority rights.

Public opinion and political actions

The question whether or not politicians follow public opinion is a much debated topic. Over time, some scholars have argued that politicians in fact do follow public opinion (Page & Shapiro, 1983; Bartels, 1991; Hartley & Russett, 1992; Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson, 1995; Burnstein, 2003; Wlezien, 2004). For example, Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson (1995) found that policy is influenced by public opinion, merely because politicians want to be reelected, and therefore need to satisfy the public

(Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson, 1995: 556-558). In other words, because a politician's career depends on public support, a politician should listen to, and satisfy the public. This would suggest that politicians also follow the public on the domain of political tolerance. As their career is depended upon public support, politicians will follow this public, also when it comes to political tolerance. This would lead towards a positive relationship between public opinion on political tolerance and political tolerance among political actions, whereby more (less) political tolerance among the public leads to more (less) political tolerant actions by politicians. However, political tolerance might be a topic that differs from other topics. It is not a "high politics" topic, and therefore it might need another explanation.

However, other scholars do not support this statement (Wlezien, 1995; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005). These scholars argue that public opinion follows policies proposed by and implemented by politicians, rather than the other way around (Wlezien, 1995; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005). (997-999) For example, Wlezien (1995) argued that changes in public opinion are caused by changes in policy, rather than the other way around (Wlezien, 1995: 997-999). According to this research, public opinion acts as a negative feedback towards policy, whereby an increase (decrease) in a certain policy leads towards a decrease (increase) in that domain in public opinion (Wlezien, 1995: 997-999). This is because the public actually responds to changes in policy, rather than the other way around. So an increase or decrease in a certain policy provokes a reaction among the public, whereby public opinion changes because of a change in policy (Wlezien, 1995). According to these arguments, one would suggest that public opinion and policies conducted by politicians are negatively related, also in the domain of political tolerance. An increase (decrease) in political tolerant policies should lead to a decrease (increase) in political tolerance among the public. This is because the public tends to react towards changes in policies in a negative way. If politicians "overshoot" public opinion (they increase or decrease a certain policy too much), the public will react demanding the exact opposite of the policy change. So an increase in a certain policy would lead to a decrease in public opinion of that policy and vice versa. This is the exact opposite of a positive relationship previously discussed.

Still other scholars argue that the relationship between public opinion and policy is not one sided (Wlezien, 1996; Soroko & Wlezien, 2004). They argue that politicians respond to changes in public opinion, but public opinion also responds to

changes in policies proposed and conducted by politicians (Wlezien, 1996; Soroko & Wlezien, 2004). This would suggest that public opinion concerning political tolerance is influenced by policy concerning political tolerance, and that this policy concerning political tolerance is influenced by public opinion. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between public opinion and policy concerning political tolerance.

Some scholars argue that there is no relationship between public opinion and policies conducted by politicians (Petry, 1999), or only a relationship on high-profile issues (Petry & Mendelshon, 2004). It could be argued that (political) elite groups are able to change policy, and when public opinion does not match with opinions held by these elite groups, policy will not change in the direction public opinion suggests. This is called the “democratic frustration model” (Petry, 1999: 540-541). This would suggest that there is only a relationship between the level of political tolerance among the public and among actions by politicians if political tolerance is a high-profile issue, and/or if public opinion on political tolerance matches opinions held by elite groups. Political tolerance could be a high-profile issue, as it deals with certain objectionable groups who could be prominent in the media (immigrants, terrorists, criminals, etc.). Therefore, political tolerance is not a specific issue, but politicians can use it explaining policies in certain fields (immigration policies, crime, war, etc.).

This shows that the literature on public opinion is too varied to draw conclusions. Following the literature on the question whether or not politicians follow public opinion would leave you with evidence that there is a positive relation between the level of tolerance among the public and the level of tolerance in political actions, a negative relation between these two variables, or no relation at all. Clearly, this literature must be combined with literature discussing political tolerance among the public and among politicians.

Political tolerance among politicians

There are scholars who have argued that politicians and the upper class of society (the highly educated) are more positive towards minority rights than the general public, which makes them more political tolerant (Prothro & Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964; Sullivan *et al*, 1993). It is argued that politicians are not only selectively recruited, which means only people who are politically tolerant get votes and therefore end up being a politician, but also become more political tolerant because of being a

politician (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). This last process is called political socialization, which means that politicians incorporate certain (political tolerant) “political values” that rule politics (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). When it comes to political tolerance, political socialization would lead to an increase in political tolerance among politicians. Politicians are selectively recruited, which means political tolerant people tend to get more votes, and therefore have a higher change to become a politician (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). Therefore, the political field is tolerant. Political socialization would increase this, as political tolerant politicians interact with each other, creating a political tolerant environment. This process would make the already political tolerant politicians even more political tolerant (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). This means politicians should be more tolerant towards minorities, and therefore more political tolerant than the general public. This would suggest that there is no relationship between the level of political tolerance among the public, and the level of political tolerant actions, as politicians all politicians are more political tolerant than the general public, and being a politician makes them even more political tolerant than the general public (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). This would suggest that all politicians are political tolerant, and therefore any change in public opinion towards political tolerance would not lead to a change in political actions.

However, other scholars do not agree with this position (Jackman, 1972; Shamir, 1991). Jackman (1972), questions the statement that politicians are more tolerant than the general public because of the values they obtain in the political field (Jackman, 1972: 772-773). Rather, Jackman (1972), claims that political socialization does not take place, and that politicians are more tolerant than the general public because they tend to be highly educated (Jackman, 1972: 772-773) In other words, politicians are more tolerant than the population in general because of higher education, and not because of political socialization (Jackman, 1972: 772-773). Shamir (1991) found that politicians are not necessarily more tolerant than the general public, and are sometimes even less tolerant than other elites like journalists and intellectuals (Shamir, 1991: 1025-1032). These scholars show that the statement that politicians are more tolerant than the general public has been criticized and is not supported by everyone. These results that show that politicians are not more tolerant than the general public, would suggest that public opinion on political tolerance can in fact have an impact on the level of political tolerant actions. As politicians are just as

tolerant as the general public, they may be influenced by this same public when it comes to political tolerance.

However, Shamir (1991) used Israel to conduct his analysis (Shamir, 1991). Israel is an extreme case where the general public, as well as politicians, have to deal with violence. Therefore, we cannot assume that these findings are also applicable in countries that are not characterized by violence. Moreover, Jackman (1972) argued that politicians are just as tolerant as other people in different high status groups (Jackman 1972: 772-773). This means that politicians are still more tolerant than the general public, but that this effect is explained by education and not by political socialization (Jackman, 1972). This still means politicians are more tolerant than the general public. Therefore, the literature concerning political tolerance among politicians would suggest that all politicians are more tolerant than the general public, because of higher education among the political class than among the general public (Jackman, 1972), or because of political socialization (Sullivan *et al*, 1993). This would suggest that there should be no relationship between the level of political tolerance among the public and the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians, as all politicians should be tolerant.

Discussion of the literature

The previously discussed literature would suggest that politicians are more tolerant than the general public, due to higher education and/or due to political socialization. Therefore, one would expect no relation between the level of political tolerance among the general public, and the level of tolerance of political actions proposed by, and conducted by politicians. As all politicians are tolerant, there should be little variation between politicians and across time when it comes to the level of tolerance in their political actions. Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis: There is most likely no relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public and the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians

In other words, a more (less) political tolerant public does not lead to more (less) political tolerant actions by politicians. Politicians are more tolerant than the general

public, and therefore it is expected that there is little to no variance between politicians and across time. Politicians are tolerant, and therefore the level of tolerance among the general public is expected to have no influence on actions proposed by and conducted by politicians.

Research Design and Methodology

The United States was studied to conduct this research. First of all, other research trying to link political tolerance among the public with political tolerant thoughts among politicians has mainly focused on the United States. Therefore, conducting this research in the United States makes it possible to compare this research with previous research.

Besides that, the United States has a presidential system. This means that one person (the president) has the mandate of a majority among the whole public. Therefore, it seems plausible that this person is highly influenced by this public, whereas in a parliamentary system, the government is made up of several individuals, sometimes coming from several political parties, who all have a different mandate (different groups of people voted for different parties). This makes it less likely to be influenced by the whole public, as these politicians and parties only serve a segment of this public. In other words, if we see a relationship between political tolerant/intolerant thoughts among the public and political tolerant/intolerant actions by politicians, we should see it in a presidential system and we should see it in the president.

Moreover, from all presidential systems, data concerning the level of tolerance among the public are vast, and readily available in the United States. Therefore, future research has the opportunity to make use of the same data and compare their findings with this research. This makes it easier to complement or contradict this research.

Lastly, by using the United States and its presidential system as a case, the results of this research can have some serious implications, as both proponents as well as opponents of a presidential system can use these findings to construct their argument. A relationship between the thoughts among the public and the actions by

the president would certainly help proponents of a presidential system to make their argument, just as no relationship would help opponents.

After selecting a case, a content analysis of state of the union addresses was conducted for this research. The state of the union addresses were coded in terms of political tolerance/intolerance. These texts were chosen, because the state of the union address is a message where the president explains the congress what actions he thinks are necessary to take (Woolley & Peters 2012). In other words, the state of the union address shows what kind of actions the president wants to take. Therefore, it is ideal to analyze how political tolerant/intolerant the president is in his actions, as the president proposes all his actions for the coming year in the state of the union address. As the president outlines his full plan of action for the coming year in the state of the union address, this message seems ideal to analyze how political tolerant/intolerant these actions are. Besides that, the state of the union address is often delivered orally and broadcasted on live television. Therefore, the president is speaking directly to the general public and should therefore reflect what this general public wants. So if there is a relationship between the level of political tolerance among the public and the level of political tolerance in actions conducted by the president, it should be seen in the state of the union addresses as this is an occasion where the presidents explains all his actions for the coming year to the whole public.

In this research, 24 state of the union address delivered between 1973 and 2011 were analyzed, except the 1973 address by Nixon, and the 1981 address by Carter, as these ones were written instead of spoken (Woolley & Peters, 2012). Therefore, these addresses were not broadcasted on live television and are therefore incomparable with the other addresses as they were not directed to the general public, but merely to the congress. Therefore, they can be different in terms of language, as an address delivered to the general public is written in a language the public understands, whereas an address delivered to the congress is written in a language members of the congress understand. Also, Reagan in 1981, Bush in 1989, Clinton in 1993, W. Bush in 2001, and Obama in 2009 addressed a joint session of the congress just after their inauguration, and the messages they delivered here are officially not considered state of the union addresses (Woolley & Peters, 2012). However, for research purposes these messages can be considered state of the union addresses, as they are messages wherein the president proposes his actions for the coming year to

the congress and the general public, as these messages were also broadcasted on live television (Woolley & Peters, 2012).

So for this research, 24 state of the union addresses between 1973 and 2011 were analyzed, except for the addresses by Nixon in 1983 and Carter in 1981. All the other 22 addresses were coded in terms of political tolerance/intolerance. To code these state of the union addresses, a suggested policy was used as the unit of analysis. Actions conducted in the past were not coded, so for example: *“During the 1960's, this country had a surplus capacity of crude oil which we were able to make available to our trading partners whenever there was a disruption of supply”*(Ford, 1975) was not coded, as this is merely a discussion of actions conducted in the past. In other words, every single policy proposed by a president in a state of the union address was coded as either tolerant, intolerant, or neutral. A policy was coded at the sub-paragraph level, as there can be several policy suggestions in one paragraph. Also, policy proposals often take more than one word or one sentence to explain, and therefore the sub-paragraph level was used. For example: *“Discrimination or violence because of race or religion, ancestry or gender, disability or sexual orientation, is wrong, and it ought to be illegal. Therefore, I ask Congress to make the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act" and the "Hate Crimes Prevention Act" the law of the land.”*(Clinton, 1999) was coded as tolerant, whereas: *“Because marriage is a sacred institution and the foundation of society, it should not be redefined by activist judges. For the good of families, children, and society, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the institution of marriage.”*(W. Bush, 2005). Other policy proposals like: *“I am proposing an increase of less than 2 percent after adjusting for inflation-the smallest increase in the Federal budget in 4 years.”* (Carter, 1978) were coded as neutral. See appendix A for a full codebook.

To come up with coding rules, a stratified random sample was taken from 24 the addresses between 1973 and 2011 (except the 1973, and 1981 address). This stratified random sample was composed of one address by every president. Also, this random stratified sample was drawn in such a matter that there was at least one address by a democratic president that focused on security and at least one address by a republican president that focused on security. This random sample of addresses was analyzed inductively to come up with a schema, or set of rules, to apply to all addresses (see appendix A for this schema). During this inductive analysis, every policy that triggered tolerance, intolerance, or neutral feelings was coded as tolerant,

intolerant, or neutral. Afterwards, a schema was made to apply to all addresses. This inductive analysis was necessary, as no previous research has focused on the level of political tolerance/intolerance in actions by presidents. Therefore, there was no existing set of rules or knowledge about how to code these state of the union addresses.

After setting up a schema, all state of the union addresses were coded manually. This coding was done manually, as different policies, and different presidents use different words to describe their policies. Therefore, it was impossible to use machine coding, as machines require a standard set of words or sentences to analyze texts. In this case, that was impossible, and therefore these texts were coded manually.

After coding these state of the union addresses, the level of political tolerant actions by the president (the dependent variable in this research) was measured by giving each policy coded as tolerant as score of +1, each policy that was coded as intolerant a score of -1, and each policy that was coded as neutral a score of 0. So, the more political tolerant a state of the union address, the higher the score, and the more political intolerant a state of the union address, the lower the score.

These scores were compared with the level of political tolerance among the general public (the independent variable in this research). To measure the level of political tolerance among the general public, surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) were used. NORC conducted 24 surveys concerning political tolerance between 1972 and 2010, of which 22 were used. In these surveys, they asked respondents whether or not members of some objectionable groups (Communists, Anti-religion extremists, homosexuals, etc.) should be allowed to speak in public, teach at a college or university, and should be able to have a book in a library (Smith, 2011). For every objectionable group, an average percentage of people saying they should be able to speak, teach and have a book in the library was calculated (Smith, 2011). These percentages were used to calculate the level of political tolerance among the general public. To calculate the level of political tolerance among the public, the average percentage of people saying they would allow some objectionable groups to speak in public, teach at a school, and have a book in a library is used. The average percentage of all objectionable groups is used, and not the percentage of the least liked group, first of all because tolerance and intolerance in the state of the union addresses was measured by coding tolerance and intolerance towards all objectionable groups, and not just the least liked group in society. Besides

this, survey respondents were asked if they would allow predetermined objectionable groups to speak, teach and have a book in a library. In other words, they could not choose their own least liked group, and therefore the average percentage of all groups is used to calculate the level of political tolerance among the general public.

To see whether or not there was a relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public, and the level of political tolerance in actions by the president, statistical analysis was conducted. Previous research shows that it is necessary to adopt a one year time-lag between feelings among the general public and actions by politicians, as it takes time for public opinion to reach politics and turn into political actions (Brooks, 1990; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2005; Hobolt & Klemmensen 2008; Page & Shapiro, 1983; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005). Therefore, this research compares the state of the union addresses with the survey results from the previous year. For example, the state of the union address by Obama in 2011 is compared with the survey results from 2010.

To see whether or not the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses co varied with the level of tolerance among the general public, a correlation analysis was conducted. Before conducting a correlation analysis, a scatterplot was set up to see if the relationship between the two variables was linear (one of the assumptions of correlation).

Results

First of all, table 1 shows the level of political tolerance among the public for each year. Political tolerance is measured by using the average percentage of respondents saying they would allow several objectionable groups to speak, teach, and have a book in a library. The higher this percentage is, the higher the level of political tolerance among the general public.

Table 1. Level of political tolerance among the general public

Year	Tolerance
1973	54.9
1974	55.0

1976	53.5
1977	52.0
1982	54.6
1984	56.4
1985	55.2
1987	57.2
1988	56.9
1989	60.9
1990	61.1
1991	62.0
1993	63.9
1994	63.4
1996	63.8
1998	65.0
2000	64.3
2002	67.7
2004	67.3
2006	66.9
2008	61.5
2010	63.3

Source: Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center between 1972 and 2010. These findings were reported by Smith (2011). See references

First of all, it is noticed that political tolerance was fairly stable, and went up in the period 1973 – 2006. After 2006, a drop in political tolerance among the general public is noticed, although political tolerance went up again in 2010. This could be due to the fact that 2008 was the first year where people were asked if they allowed Muslims to speak in public, teach at a school, and have a book in a library (Smith, 2011). Therefore, these findings might show feelings that already existed before 2008, but only came to the forefront when people were asked about the freedoms they would allow Muslims to have.

Table 2 shows the level of political tolerance in the state of the union addresses. Here, political tolerance is measured, by subtracting the amount of intolerant policy proposals from the amount of tolerant policy proposals. Therefore, a

“0” score does not mean there were no tolerant and/or intolerant policy proposals. It could also mean that the amount of tolerant policy proposals was equal to the amount of intolerant policy proposals. The higher the number is, the more political tolerant the state of the union address.

Table 2. Level of tolerance in political tolerance in state of the union addresses

Address	Tolerance
Nixon 1974	0
Ford 1975	0
Ford 1977	0
Carter 1978	1
Reagan 1983	4
Reagan 1985	0
Reagan 1986	0
Reagan 1988	0
Bush 1989	0
Bush 1990	0
Bush 1991	0
Bush 1992	-1
Clinton 1994	-1
Clinton 1995	-3
Clinton 1997	-4
Clinton 1999	-2
W. Bush 2001	-2
W. Bush 2003	-3
W. Bush 2005	-3
W. Bush 2007	-2
Obama 2009	0
Obama 2011	2

Source: a content analysis of the state of the union addresses. See appendix A

It is noticed that in the period 1974 – 1991 the amount of tolerant and intolerant policy proposals was fairly equal (except for the state of the union address by Reagan in 1983, where he proposed 4 more tolerant policies than intolerant policies). However, in the period 1992 – 2007, the state of the union addresses became slightly less tolerant. In this period, presidents tended to propose more intolerant policies than tolerant policies. This is in contrast with table 1, which showed that political tolerance generally went up in this period, whereas it went down dramatically in 2008.

Table 3 combines table 1 and 2. There seems to be no clear pattern in the period 1973 – 1991. Both the tolerance among the general public, as well as the tolerance in the state of the union addresses are fairly stable, except for 1983, where Reagan delivered the most tolerant of all of the state of the union addresses. However, in the period 1992 – 2007, the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses is lower than in the period before, while the level of tolerance among the general public

went up. This seems to indicate that there is no positive relationship between the level of tolerance among the general public and the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses. These findings do not seem to indicate that when the level of political tolerance among the public goes up, the level of tolerance in the state of the union address goes up. Rather, it seems to indicate that if there is a relationship, it is a negative relationship, whereby the level of tolerance in the state of the union address goes down when the level of political tolerance among the general public goes up, and the level of tolerance in the state of the union address goes up when the level of political tolerance among the public goes down.

Table 3. Level of political tolerance among the public and in the state of the union addresses

Address	Tolerance public	Tolerance address
Nixon 1973	54.9	0
Ford 1975	55.0	0
Ford 1977	53.5	0
Carter 1978	52.0	1
Reagan 1983	54.6	4
Reagan 1985	56.4	0
Reagan 1986	55.2	0
Reagan 1988	57.2	0
Bush 1989	56.9	0
Bush 1990	60.9	0
Bush 1991	61.1	0
Bush 1992	62.0	-1
Clinton 1994	63.9	-1
Clinton 1995	63.4	-3
Clinton 1997	63.8	-4
Clinton 1999	65.0	-2
W. Bush 2001	64.3	-2
W. Bush 2003	67.7	-3
W. Bush 2005	67.3	-3
W. Bush 2007	66.9	-2
Obama 2009	61.5	0
Obama 2011	63.3	2

Sources: Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center between 1972 and 2010. These findings were reported by Smith (2011). See references. A content analysis of the state of the union addresses. See appendix A

To see whether or not the level of political tolerance in the state of the union addresses significantly correlated with the level of political tolerance among the general public, a scatterplot was conducted and interpreted. The scatterplot did not show a clear pattern, and therefore the assumption of a linear relation between the two variables (necessary for correlation) is met.

First of all, the correlation analysis showed an r value of $-.580$. Therefore, $R^2 = .336$ which means that 33.6% of all variance in the level of tolerance of the state of the union addresses is explained by the level of tolerance among the general public. This is not a very high percentage. The analysis also showed that r differs significantly from 0 (*Sig. p < 0.01*). This means that the overall correlation is significant, and that the level of tolerance among the general public significantly correlates with the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses. In other

words, there was a significant relationship between the level of tolerance among the general public and the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses, $r = -.580$, $p < 0.01$.

Next, the value of r shows the kind of relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public and the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses. The correlation analysis showed a value of $r = -.580$. This shows that the level of tolerance among the general public, and the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses are negatively related, as r ranges from -1 (perfect negative relationship) to $+1$ (perfect positive relationship), whereby 0 indicated no relationship.. In other words, an increase in political tolerance among the general public will cause a decrease of political tolerance in a state of the union address, whereas a decrease of political tolerance among the general public will lead to an increase of political tolerance in a state of the union address. These findings are summarized in table 4.

Table 4. Correlation analysis

	Tolerance public	Tolerance state of the union address
Analysis		
Tolerance public	1	-.580**
Tolerance state of the union address	-.580**	1

Note: $r = -.580$ ($p < 0.01$). **= $p < 0.01$

The same correlation analysis was conducted without using Muslims as a group in the survey results from 2008 and 2010. Because the drop in political tolerance among the general public in 2008 seems to be explained by the fact that this is the first year that respondents were asked how much freedom they would allow Muslims to have, these results might not be comparable with results from previous surveys, as Muslims drop the average percentage of people saying they would allow several objectionable groups to speak, teach and have a book in a library. Therefore, the average percentages of respondent saying they would allow several objectionable groups to speak, teach and have a book in a library in 2008 and 2010 were recalculated, excluding Muslims. After recalculating these average percentages, the same regression analysis was conducted.

First of all, a scatterplot was conducted. This scatterplot did not show a clear pattern, and therefore the assumption of a linear relationship between the two variables is met.

The correlation analysis showed an r value of $-.477$. Therefore, $R^2 = 0.228$, which means that 22.8% of all variance in the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses is explained by variance in the level of tolerance among the public (note that this is less variance explained than the other correlation analysis which included Muslims in 2008 and 2010). The analysis showed that r differs significantly from 0 (*Sig. p* < 0.05). This means that the overall correlation is significant, and that the level of tolerance among the general public has a significant effect on the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses. In other words, there was a significant relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public and the level of political tolerance in the state of the union addresses, $r = -.477$, $p < 0.05$.

The correlation analysis also showed a negative relation between the level of political tolerance among the public and the level of political tolerance in the state of the union addresses, as r has a value of $-.477$ which is below 0, and therefore the relationship is negative.. Again, this shows that the level of tolerance among the public, and the level of tolerance in the state of the union addresses are negatively related. The relationship is weaker when Muslims are excluded from the survey results from 2008 and 2010 are excluded. The findings are summarized in table 5.

Table 5. Correlation analysis excluding Muslims in 2008 and 2010

	Tolerance public	Tolerance state of the union addresses
Analysis		
Tolerance public	1	-.477*
Tolerance state of the union addresses	-.477*	1

Note: $R = -.477$ ($p < 0.05$) * $p < 0.05$

Conclusion

This research shows how the level of political tolerant actions by politicians significantly correlates with the level of political tolerance among the general public. This contradicts previous research, which suggests that politicians are more tolerant than the general public (Prothro & Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964; Sullivan *et al*, 1993). If politicians exhibit some characteristics that make them more tolerant than the general public, one would suggest that all politicians are political tolerant, and therefore there should be no relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public, and the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians, as all politicians are tolerant, no matter what the level of political tolerance among the general public. However, this research concludes that the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians is in fact influenced by the level of political tolerance among the general public. Therefore, these previous findings should be questioned.

Another important implication of this research is that this research concludes that the level of political tolerance among the general public, and the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians are negatively related. In other words, the more political tolerant the general public is, the more political intolerant the actions conducted by politicians, and the less political tolerant the general public is, the more political tolerant the actions conducted by politicians. This contradicts common sense, as one would think that politicians will act more tolerant when the general public is more tolerant, and act less tolerant when the general public is less tolerant. However, this research contradicts this line of thinking.

This research also contradicts previous research which suggests that politicians follow public opinion, and act in ways that are in line with public opinion (Page & Shapiro, 1983; Bartels, 1991; Hartley & Russett, 1992; Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson, 1995; Burnstein, 2003; Wlezien, 2004). This research shows that on the topic of political tolerance, politicians actually act in ways that contradict public opinion, as they act less tolerant when the general public is more tolerant and vice versa.

To come back to the hypothesis (There is most likely no relationship between the level of political tolerance among the general public and the level of political tolerant actions conducted by politicians), one has to conclude that this research did not find any support for this hypothesis. This research contradicts this hypothesis, and

therefore this hypothesis cannot be confirmed until other data that suggests it can be confirmed is acquired.

Discussion

These findings have some serious implications. First of all, it opens up an academic discussion concerning the question whether or not politicians are more tolerant than the general public. Previous research concludes that politicians are in fact more tolerant than the general public (Prothro & Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964; Sullivan et al, 1993). That would lead one to suggest that the level of tolerance in actions conducted by politicians is not related to the level of political tolerance among the general public, as all politicians are tolerant, with or without a political tolerant public. However, this research contradicts this, as this research concludes that the level of tolerance in actions conducted by politicians is in fact related with the level of tolerance among the general public. However, this does not rule out the statement that politicians are more tolerant than the general public. It is possible that politicians are indeed more tolerant than the general public, and that there is a negative relationship between the level of tolerance in actions conducted and proposed by politicians and the level of political tolerance among the general public. This research is unable to tell whether or not politicians are more tolerant than the general public, as this research does not compare these two groups. However, the fact that these findings do not match with predictions based on previous research that suggests that politicians are more tolerant than the mass can lead to academic debates.

Another debate that is fueled by this research is the debate concerning the influence of public opinion on behavior by politicians. Some scholars have argued that politicians follow public opinion (Page & Shapiro, 1983; Bartels, 1991; Hartley & Russett, 1992; Stimson, Mackuen & Erikson, 1995; Burnstein, 2003; Wlezien, 2004), whereas other scholars argued that public opinion follows policies implemented by politicians (Wlezien, 1995; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005). This research would suggest that politicians do not follow public opinion in the field of political tolerance, as this research concludes that the level of tolerance in actions conducted by politicians and the level of political tolerance

among the general public are in fact negatively related, which means that politicians do the exact opposite of public opinion. When public opinion asks for more tolerant actions, politicians act less tolerant and vice versa. This would suggest that politicians do not follow public opinion. This research cannot tell whether or not public opinion actually follows policies conducted by politicians.

Also, Hobolt & Klemmensen (2008) argued that the electoral system is of vital importance when it comes the question whether or not politicians follow public opinion. They argue that politicians are most likely to follow public opinion in presidential systems (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). This research contradicts these findings, as this research found out that in the field of political tolerance, American presidents do not tend to follow public opinion, but rather, they tend to contradict public opinion.

However, this research has some important shortcomings. First of all, it could be argued that the state of the union address is not a clear summary of all policies a president is going to conduct. It could be argued that the state of the union address is merely an expression to win public support. However, the president still outlines his main policies for the coming year, and although it is an expression, written in words that favor public support, it still measures actions a president is going to conduct better than a set of questions. In other words, although the state of the union address is not a flawless document to measure the actions a president is going to conduct, as it is written in a certain way that pleases the public, it still shows the main policies a president will conduct. Therefore, using the state of the union address allows one to match thoughts among the public with actions by the president.

An important shortcoming of using the state of the union addresses, however, is that some of the state of the union addresses do not really propose a lot of political tolerant or political intolerant policies. Some presidents face reelections just after delivering their state of the union address, and therefore, they select their words with caution. They do not want to let a group of voters down, and therefore they do not really express themselves. Also, they tend to focus on their achievements (maybe to win public support), and not on their plan of action for the coming year. Therefore, these state of the union addresses might not be able to measure the level of tolerance of actions proposed by, and conducted by the president.

Also, there was a problem of overrepresentation of republican presidents, and underrepresentation of democratic presidents. The NORC conducted 24 surveys

between 1972 and 2010. These surveys had irregular time-intervals (sometimes 1 year, sometimes 2, and sometimes 3). Therefore, not every state of the union address by every president could be linked to survey results. Because of the irregular time-intervals, some presidents were overrepresented, while others were underrepresented.

For example, 4 state of the union addresses by Bush could be linked to survey results, while only 1 state of the union address by Carter could be linked (2 could be linked, but one of these 2 was not used, as this one was written instead of spoken). Both of them were in office for one term, so in this example, Bush is clearly overrepresented, while Carter is underrepresented. In general, however, republicans were overrepresented, with 15 out of the 22 (68%) state of the union addresses that were analyzed being delivered by republican presidents, while they served as president 64% of the time between 1973 – 2011. It might be that republican presidents use other language than democratic presidents, and therefore, republican presidents might be more or less political tolerant than democratic presidents. Therefore, the overrepresentation of republican president might influence the findings. However, there is only a minor overrepresentation, and therefore it does not seem likely that this influenced the findings dramatically.

This research found that the level of political tolerance in actions conducted by politicians is related to the level of political tolerance among the public. This research found that the two variables are negatively related, and as such, the level of political tolerance in actions conducted by politicians goes down when the level of tolerance among the public goes up, and vice versa. This opens up academic, as well as real world discussions. To complement this research, future research should focus on relations between public opinion and actions by politicians on other fields (taxation, defense, etc.). It might be that the findings of this research apply to other fields as well, which means that we would see a negative relation between public opinion and actions conducted by politicians in other political fields as well, or it might be that these findings only apply to the topic of political tolerance. Future research should address this question. Future research can also focus on other aspects of actions conducted by politicians. For instance, future research can use actual enacted legislation, instead of proposed policies, to measure actions conducted by politicians. All in all, this research showed how the level of political tolerance among the public

and the level of political tolerance in actions conducted by politicians are negatively related, and therefore it opened up questions for debate and future research.

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Appendix A: Codebook

A. General Rules for Identifying Policies

- Unit of Analysis: tolerant, intolerant, or neutral policy proposal at the sub-paragraph level.
 - A paragraph may contain more than one policy proposal.
 - When multiple policies are proposed within a paragraph, each policy proposal is coded separately.
 - Policy proposals can be spread out over more than one paragraph (article-level policy proposals are coded).

- Rules for identifying policy proposals:
 - A coded observation must be a policy proposal
 - A policy proposal can be made in several ways:
 - Proposal (e.g., “To bolster business and industry and to create new jobs, I propose a 1-year tax reduction of \$16 billion.”).
 - Rejection of policy (e.g., “I will not hesitate to veto any new spending programs adopted by the Congress.”).
 - Recommendation (e.g., “I recommend a 5-percent limit on Federal pay increases in 1975.”).
 - Submit legislation: (e.g., “I am submitting Clean Air [Act] amendments which will allow greater coal use without sacrificing clean air goals.”).
 - Request (e.g., “I will request that the proposed 6-month freeze in cost-of-living adjustments recommended by the bipartisan Social Security Commission be applied to other government-related retirement programs.”).
 - Ask, or urge congress to act (e.g., “I ask for full funding of Medicaid, an increase of over \$3 billion, and an expansion of the program to include coverage of pregnant women who are near the poverty line.”).

- Support of policy (e.g., “I support a 1-year freeze in the military budget, something I proposed last fall in my flexible freeze plan.”).
 - The policy proposal must be clear. Examples:
 - Clear policy proposal: “I’m asking the Congress to add \$25 billion in defense spending over the next 6 years.”).
 - Unclear policy proposal: “At home, we must reject the mistaken notion – an notion that has dominated too much of the public dialogue for too long – that ever bigger government is the answer to every problem.”.
- Rules for distinguishing between tolerant, intolerant, and neutral policy proposals:
 - A policy proposal can only be coded as either tolerant, intolerant, or neutral.
 - A policy proposal that increases the freedom of an objectionable, or minority group is coded as tolerant
 - Objectionable groups are groups such as: communists, atheists, terrorists, (ex)criminals, etc.
 - Minority groups are groups such as: immigrants, women, blacks, Hispanics, disabled, homosexuals, etc.
 - Examples:
 - “We will continue our vigorous enforcement of existing statutes, and I will once again press the Congress to strengthen the laws against employment discrimination without resorting to the use of unfair preferences”.
 - “Therefore, I ask Congress to make the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act" and the "Hate Crimes Prevention Act" the law of the land.”
 - A policy proposal that limits the freedom of an objectionable, or minority group is coded as intolerant.
 - Examples:

- “I ask Congress to restore the 5-day waiting period for buying a handgun and extend the Brady bill to prevent juveniles who commit violent crimes from buying a gun”.
- “Because marriage is a sacred institution and the foundation of society, it should not be redefined by activist judges. For the good of families, children, and society, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the institution of marriage.”
- Policy proposals that do not either increase, or limit the freedom of an objectionable, or minority group, is coded as neutral.

B. Tolerant policy proposals

- Extending freedom rights to religious groups
 - For example:
 - “passage of tuition tax credits for parents who want to send their children to private or religiously affiliated schools; a constitutional amendment to permit voluntary school prayer.”
 - “But no citizen need tremble, nor the world shudder, if a child stands in a classroom and breathes a prayer. We ask you again, give children back a right they had for a century and a half or more in this country.”
- Extending freedom rights of women
 - For example:
 - “Our commitment to fairness means that we must assure legal and economic equity for women, and eliminate, once and for all, all traces of unjust discrimination against women from the United States Code.”
 - “And let's make sure that women and men get equal pay for equal work by strengthening enforcement of equal pay laws.
- Extending freedom rights of criminals/terrorists
 - For example:

- “And that is why I have ordered the closing of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay and will seek swift and certain justice for captured terrorists.”
- Extending freedom rights of the disabled.
 - For example:
 - “My New Freedom Initiative for Americans with disabilities funds new technologies, expands opportunities to work, and makes our society more welcoming. For the more than 50 million Americans with disabilities, we must continue to break down barriers to equality.
- Extending freedom rights of immigrants
 - For example:
 - “I know it will take time. But tonight, let's agree to make that effort. And let's stop expelling talented, responsible young people who could be staffing our research labs or starting a new business, who could be further enriching this Nation.”
- Extending freedom rights of homosexuals/lesbians
 - For example:
 - “Starting this year, no American will be forbidden from serving the country they love because of who they love.”
- Extending freedom rights of racial minority groups (black, Hispanics, etc.).
 - For example:
 - “We will continue our vigorous enforcement of existing statutes, and I will once again press the Congress to strengthen the laws against employment discrimination without resorting to the use of unfair preferences.”

C. Intolerant policy proposals

- Restricting freedom rights of criminals
 - For example:

- “Finally, we must also protect our children by standing firm in our determination to ban the advertising and marketing of cigarettes that endanger their lives.”
- Restricting freedom rights of homosexuals/lesbians
 - For example:
 - “Because marriage is a sacred institution and the foundation of society, it should not be redefined by activist judges. For the good of families, children, and society, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the institution of marriage.”