THE DEVIL SHIFT: PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS OF OPPONENTS

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WITHIN the behavioral sciences, most research assumes that rationality is a commonly shared attribute of mankind — that the defining characteristic of humans is their ability to examine alternatives, estimate their consequences, and then select one which allows them to achieve their goals. While pure rationality — with its assumptions of perfect information, a complete set of preference orderings, and unlimited computational ability — has been subjected to devastating criticism, even theories of bounded rationality assume that subjects obtain reasonably accurate information concerning the more important consequences of a few alternatives before making decisions (March and Simon 1958; Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963; Elster 1979; Nesbitt and Ross 1980; Simon 1985).

In the strategic interaction characteristic of most political situations, one of the critical informational requirements for choosing among alternative strategies of goal attainment is that actors be able to assess accurately the goals and resources of their adversaries. An accurate knowledge of opponents’ goals and probable strategies is necessary for determining when to counter them. Allocating scarce resources to fight someone makes little sense unless one is reasonably sure that the opponent’s strategies will adversely affect one’s interests or goals. And an accurate assessment of opponents’ resources (and one’s own) is required if one is to maximize chances for success. Allocating too many resources is wasteful, and allocating too few will lead to defeat (Goodin and Dryzek 1980).

Despite the importance of accurately perceiving opponents’ goals and resources, there is surprisingly little solid evidence on the extent to which adversaries accurately perceive each other’s motives, values, and resources. Scholars of international relations have probably given the most attention to this subject (Buchanan and Cantril 1953; Finlay et al. 1967; Jervis 1976), but the conclusions are contradictory. On the one hand, most actors in

Received: December 11, 1985
Revision Received: August 4, 1986
Accepted for Publication: August 7, 1986

NOTE: This research has been made possible by grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF SES 84-11032), the Institute of Governmental Affairs, and the Dean of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (U.C. Davis). We are very grateful for their support; note, however, that neither NSF, nor IGA, nor the Dean are at all responsible for the findings in this paper. The authors would like to thank Neil Pelkey for his important contributions to portions of the data analysis — particularly scale construction — as well as to Aage Clausen, Paul Culhane, Joel Johnson and Randy Siverson for their helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.
World War I and in the American Civil War seriously underestimated opponents’ strength (Catton 1951; Tuchman 1962; Holsti 1965); the Japanese underestimated American strength during WWII (Hoyt 1972); and John Forster Dulles underestimated the political and economic strength of the Soviet Union in the 1950s (Holsti 1967). But there are also examples of overestimating opponents’ strength. McClellan was so convinced that Lee had a vastly superior force during the latter stages of the Civil War that he refused to attack Rebel forces (Catton 1951). Finally, there is evidence that Hitler accurately estimated opponents’ strength and strategies at the onset of World War II (Mosley 1969).

One would think that the public opinion and political campaign literature would be a rich source of evidence, but we have found very little solid work. Perhaps the classic example of underestimating an opponent was the Dewey-Truman campaign, when Dewey so underestimated Truman’s strength that he failed to campaign seriously. In addition, Brady and Sniderman (1985: Table 1) have shown that liberals perceive conservatives to be less conservative than they actually are, while conservatives perceive liberals to be more liberal than is the case. But this research on the “left shift” concerning values contains no information on perceptions of opponents’ strength.

The interest group literature provides similarly mixed results. This is epitomized by Milbrath’s (1963: 139) study of Washington lobbyists in which he found that they generally perceived themselves to be more successful than their opponents, but that, when asked to name the most successful lobbyist, generally picked their most recent opponent. In a similar study, with opposite findings, Cherington and Gillen (1962) concluded that lobbyists often rated themselves as weaker than their opponents. This is the more general trend. For example, Culhane’s (1981: 212) study of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management found that both environmentalists and economic user groups perceived the land management agencies to be “captured” by their opponents — thus suggesting that opponents were stronger than themselves and/or that public officials were predisposed towards their adversaries. And, in a partial replication of Culhane, Davis and Davis (1985) found that economic users and environmentalists generally perceived their opponents to be stronger than did most other members of the policy community concerned with public lands management in Wyoming.

In an effort to focus additional attention on this confused and — outside of international relations — neglected topic, this paper first develops a general argument and then examines data from an elite survey. The argument involves what we term “the devil shift,” i.e., that actors perceive opponents to be stronger and more “evil” than they actually are. It then tests specific aspects of the general argument with respect to a survey of 200 actors involved in land use and water quality policy-making at Lake Tahoe, one of the country’s most beautiful recreational areas and the scene of intense conflict since the mid-1960s. The concluding section briefly ad-
dresses the generalizability of our findings and suggests some directions for future research.

**The Devil Shift**

The basic argument of this paper is that, at least in relatively high conflict situations, political elites tend to see their opponents as “devils,” i.e., as being more powerful and more “evil” than they actually are. This is not a very surprising argument in international relations, where people from quite different cultures understandably regard each other with considerable suspicion — a situation exacerbated by the absence of any authoritative machinery for conflict resolution. Nor is it very surprising in countries like Lebanon, Iran, or Algeria, comprised of close-knit family and religious groups where politics can often be interpreted as clan warfare. Finally, it would be expected in countries like Italy and Austria whose elites tend to have dogmatic, dichotomous political maps — “good guys” versus “bad guys” (Putnam 1976: 86).

But we shall argue that it also occurs in countries like the U.S., Britain, or Sweden, where political elites are presumed to follow the “norm of restrained partisanship,” i.e., to see one another as legitimate contestants in a mutually beneficial game rather than as belligerants in a Hobbesian war (Putnam 1976: 86).

**The Basic Hypotheses**

The general tenets of the devil shift argument can be reduced to a number of more specific hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Actors will impugn the motives and/or reasonableness of their opponents while perceiving themselves to be reasonable people acting out of concern for the public welfare.

**Hypothesis 2:** Actors will evaluate their opponents’ behavior in harsher terms than will most members of their policy community, while evaluating their own behavior in more favorable terms.

**Hypothesis 3:** Actors will perceive their opponents to be more influential, and themselves to be less influential, than will most members of their policy community.

Finally, the extent of distortion of influence and of belief is presumed to vary with ideological distance. In particular:

**Hypothesis 4:** The amount of distortion (or “devil shift”) is correlated with the distance between one’s beliefs and those of one’s opponents.

Thus opponents who have very different beliefs — e.g., on a conservativism scale — will overemphasize their adversaries’ influence and negative aspects more than elites who are closer together.

All of these hypotheses require a reasonably valid standard of comparison against which one can measure the amount of distortion. In some cases, there may be relatively objective measures of beliefs (e.g., private correspondence) or of influence (e.g., changes in floor votes following major lobby-
ing campaigns). Even in these cases, however, the indicators may measure only a portion of influence or belief. Thus a second strategy is to rely on the average perception of participants in the relevant political subsystem or issue network (Heclo 1978; Sabatier 1987). This assumes that members have had considerable experience with each other and that the use of a measure of central tendency will compensate for individual distortions. Neither strategy is foolproof. While a combination of the two is probably optimal, it is also very expensive — particularly in dealing with a policy community of any size. In this paper, we shall rely almost exclusively on the second strategy for a standard of comparison.

**Misperception of Beliefs**

Hypotheses 1 and 2 contend that actors will evaluate their opponents' motives and behavior, respectively, in more negative terms than will the rest of the policy community. These are really very straightforward arguments derived from theories dealing with own group bias and with cognitive balance/dissonance (Festinger 1957; Abelson et al. 1968; Wicklund and Brehm 1976; Harrison 1976: 547-50)

Most actors start with the assumption that they are right-thinking, virtuous, and fair in their judgments (Harrison 1976). Thus anyone who disagrees with them must be mistaken about the facts, operating from the wrong value premises, or acting from evil motives. A fundamental tenet of balance/dissonance theories is that people find it very difficult to balance a positive self-image with a positive image of someone who disagrees with them (Festinger 1957; Abelson et al. 1968; Wicklund and Brehm 1976). The longer opponents persist in their "error" — i.e., resist our sound arguments — the more one begins to suspect their motives or otherwise regard them as dangerous and untrustworthy. This is particularly true if they persist in disagreeing with us on issues which we regard as salient (Lawrence 1976; Judd and Johnson 1981; Freeman and Hittle 1985).

The dynamics of conflict create tendencies for negative judgments to escalate over time. An important feature of policy conflicts is that the winners are often able to impose costs on the losers. If A — whom B already suspects of being misguided — imposes costs on B, B’s view of A is likely to deteriorate further. As the competition escalates, B is tempted to take more and more questionable measures, but these can only be justified by portraying opponent A in more and more negative terms. Hence, in conflicts which are intense and of reasonably long duration, the dynamics of escalation tend to transform opponents from responsible adversaries into people with extreme and dangerous views (Coleman 1957). Thus opponents begin to impugn each other's motives more and more (Hypothesis 1) and to come to increasingly negative evaluations of their behavior (Hypothesis 2).

**Misperception of Influence**

There are at least four bodies of theory which provide possible explanations for the tendency to exaggerate opponents' relative influence. The first comes from the literature in cognitive psychology, where there is fairly
strong evidence that people tend to perceive and to recall negative aspects more than positive ones (Harrison 1976: 117-18; Fiske and Taylor 1980; Lau 1985). Since most people are relatively pleased with their lives, negative experiences stand out more than do positive ones of comparable magnitude (Sears 1983).

A second explanation relies on the differential availability of information (Taylor and Fiske 1978; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982: chaps. 11-13).¹ In most ongoing political conflicts — as opposed to life in general — individuals will more often experience frustration than success: Delays, temporary stalemates, compromises, and perhaps even defeats are more frequent than victories for most actors. Thus one is likely to be acutely aware of the limitations of one’s influence and perhaps even to exaggerate one’s weaknesses. On the other hand, one seldom experiences the frustrations of one’s opponents. But one does experience opponents’ successes, as they generally come at one’s expense. Hence the two processes combine to accentuate one’s own perceived weaknesses, to minimize the perceived weaknesses of one’s opponents, and thus to exaggerate opponents’ relative influence.

The third explanation for exaggerating the perceived power of one’s opponents has its origin in the interest-group literature. Milbrath (1963) and Moe (1980) have argued that interest groups tend to exaggerate the power of their opponents in order to promote internal cohesion, rally their members to political action, and aid in fund-raising. For example, the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth during the 1980s used the image of former Interior Secretary James Watt as virtually the devil incarnate to increase substantially their membership and financial resources.² But what begins as tactical efforts to exaggerate the power of one’s opponents tends to take on a life of its own, as leaders are forced to repeat and justify their claims and as members are bombarded with negative images. In short, what begins as propaganda comes to be enshrined in organizational doctrine and transmitted to adherents.

There may also be ego defense reasons for exaggerating opponents’ power. In cases of defeat, it is much more comforting to one’s self-image to attribute defeat to the overwhelming resources of one’s opponents than to admit that one’s own position was not that persuasive. This is particularly true if one has put forth a major effort and still lost (Fiske and Taylor 1984: 84-86).

While these are all sound arguments for overestimating the power of one’s opponents, there are also grounds for coming to the opposite conclusion. In particular, Freud argued that we repress past bad experiences; Janis (1982: 35-36) provides evidence that “group think” tends to exaggerate

¹ The authors wish to thank Joel Johnson for suggesting this very imaginative extension of available theory.
² Starting very early in Watt’s tenure, the monthly magazine of Friends of the Earth (Not Man Apart) has a column entitled “Watt Watch” in which the latest horror stories were chronicled. See also, the August 1984 issue of Not Man Apart, which contains a cartoon of Watt as bulldozer and a satire on “Watt National Stumpland Park.”
one’s own power; and, as we have seen, the international relations literature provides numerous example of underestimating opponents’ resources.

On balance, however, we feel there are stronger theoretical grounds for overestimating the relative influence of one’s opponents. The argument based on differential availability of information strikes us a particularly persuasive.

It is now time to examine these hypotheses in a concrete situation involving reasonably intense conflict of fairly long duration. If the devil shift is not corroborated in such a case, one would not expect it to be present in situations of more moderate, short-term conflict.

**Conflict Over Land Use Policy at Lake Tahoe: Background and Data Base**

**Background**

Lake Tahoe is a large, extremely clear lake nestled in the Sierra Nevada mountains on the California-Nevada border about 200 miles east of San Francisco and 40 miles west of Reno. Because of its large size (190 square miles), exceptional blue color, and extraordinary mountain setting, it is one of the premier outdoor recreation areas in the Western United States.

For decades it was sufficiently isolated and inaccessible in winter that it was primarily used as a summer resort by wealthy families from the Bay Area and the rest of Northern California. But the completion of an interstate highway (I-80) in 1960, the publicity brought by the 1960 Olympics at nearby Squaw Valley, the lure of gambling casinos opened on the Nevada side of the lake, and the general prosperity of the 1960s fueled a boom in tourism and second-home construction around the Lake during the 1960s and 1970s. The permanent population of the Tahoe Basin went from 12,200 in 1960 to 26,100 in 1970, while the number of visitors on a peak summer Sunday increased from 30,000 in 1956 to 196,000 in 1970 (Ingram and Sabatier 1986).

While these trends were viewed with favor by most local government officials and businessmen, they also created rather serious problems of sewage disposal, erosion (adversely affecting water clarity), and the gradual urbanization of a beautiful mountain setting. Initial efforts focused on the sewage question, leading to the export of most sewage from the Basin by the late 1960s.

Attention then turned to land development activities — e.g., housing, commercial, and highway construction — which were perceived as contributing to soil erosion and the release of nutrients into the lake, thus increasing algal productivity and eventually degrading Tahoe’s exceptional water clarity (Goldman 1981). Environmental groups — notably the League to Save Lake Tahoe (hereafter referred to as the League) — and California state officials favored increased restrictions on development, while local government officials, local businessmen, and most Nevada state officials supported the status quo of permissive local planning (Costantini and Hanf 1973). After several years of conflict, the legislatures of the two states in 1968-69 approved a compromise creating the bi-state Tahoe Regional Plan-
ning Agency (TRPA). The legislation provided for a ten-member governing board (six local and four state officials). It required the TRPA to develop a land use plan and regulate development within the context of a general mandate to balance environmental protection and the economic welfare of Basin residents. Controversy soon engulfed the TRPA. While its 1971 General Plan was sufficiently restrictive to anger many businessmen and property owners, its approval of several casino expansions in 1973-74 enraged environmental groups.

In the mid-1970s, California state officials started using other institutions — most notably, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (which had a majority of environmentalists on its governing board) — to promote more environmentally sensitive policies in the Basin. The end result was a substantial downzoning of most land on the California side of the Basin, severe restriction on new subdivisions, several sewer connection moratoria, and substantial restrictions on the ability of about 18,000 lot owners in improved subdivisions (i.e., those with roads and utilities) to build a house on their property. These actions so upset local businessmen, governmental officials, and owners of unbuilt lots that in 1980 they created a property-rights interest group, the Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council (hereafter referred to as the Preservation Council).

In 1980, California state officials and environmental groups gained sufficient support from Nevada legislators to revise the TRPA’s statute to provide for a majority of non-local officials on its governing board and to give greater attention to environmental protection. The same year Congress approved legislation providing for the purchase of additional lands in the Basin by the U.S. Forest Service (which already owned over fifty percent of the land area). Since that time the TRPA has been trying to revise its plan to be consistent with the 1980 statute. After years of conflict, the TRPA in April 1984 adopted a new general plan, but its enforcement was stymied by a court injunction issued at the request of the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the California Attorney General because of the plan’s perceived inability to meet various environmental protection provisions of the 1980 law. The June 1984 court order, which enjoins all construction in the Basin pending approval of an acceptable plan, was still in effect as of November 1985.

Land use policies in the Tahoe Basin over the past fifteen years have been the subject of virtually continuous and rather intense conflict. These have involved at least four major changes in legislation, three general plans, and innumerable lawsuits involving millions of dollars in damages. For largely descriptive histories of this period, see Strong (1984) and Ingram and Sabatier (1986)

**Data Base**

As part of a major research project examining changes in land use and water quality policy in the Basin over the last two decades, in the fall of 1984 we distributed a nine-page questionnaire to 334 people active in policymaking concerning these policy areas. The purpose was to survey the en-
tire policy community (or subsystem) concerned with land use and water quality in the Basin. Replicating methods developed by Costantini and Hanf (1973), our census included 232 actors chosen because of their formal positions (e.g., local and state governmental officials, members of the boards of the League and the Preservation Council, journalists); 82 people selected because they appeared several times in newspaper articles or in the minutes of relevant agencies; and 20 additional actors nominated by the first group as influentials. We received 202 completed questionnaires, a response rate of 60 percent.\(^3\)

The data base for this paper is taken from those responses. Questions dealt with perceived problems affecting the Tahoe Basin; a variety of policy proposals; general attitudes concerning environmental quality, economic development, and the proper locus of governmental authority; a number of items designed to elicit perceived causal relationships concerning inter-governmental relations and the factors affecting water quality; evaluations of the influence and performance of various groups; and the standard demographic quesitons. Copies of the questionnaire are available from the authors.

**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This section will first explain our methodology for determining the basic lineup of allies and opponents at Tahoe. We shall then examine in turn each of the first three hypotheses of the devil shift dealing with perceptions of opponents' motives, behavior, and influence. The fourth hypothesis — that the extent of devil shift is a function of ideological distance — is really a component of the other three.

**The Basic Lineup of Allies and Opponents**

The starting point for our analysis must be the identification of opposing groups and individuals in land use and water quality disputes at Lake Tahoe. Consistent with the basic logic of Hypothesis 4, we are defining

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\(^3\) The final set of respondents included 106 of the 232 people chosen by formal position, 71 of the 82 people selected from minutes and newspaper stories, and all 20 people nominated as overlooked influentials by members of our advisory committee. The relatively modest response rate from those solicited because of formal position can partially be attributed to the fact that some state and federal government officials had only a rather limited interest in Tahoe (despite their formal position) and thus did not take the time to respond. The more serious question is whether response rate biased our results. On the basis of two sorts of analyses, we conclude that this was not a serious problem. First, we looked at formal position. Among interest-group leaders, there is no particular reason to think that respondents differed from non-respondents. Among governmental officials, there is evidence that civil servants were less susceptible to the devil shift than either elected officials or political appointees (see footnote 11). An analysis of respondents indicated no difference in response rates for civil servants (vs. non-civil servants) among state and federal officials, although elected officials were underrepresented among local government respondents. Thus this would suggest a slight underrepresentation of the extent of devil shift in the overall sample. The second form of analysis was to compare early vs. late respondents on several critical items (on the assumption that late respondents were similar to non-respondents). This revealed no statistically significant differences between early, middle, and late respondents.
“allies” as people with shared beliefs and attitudes on the policy issues under investigation, while “opponents” are those with quite different beliefs on the same issues. This is consistent with long-standing research on group reference structures (Festinger and Thibaut 1951; Fiedler, Warrington, and Blaisdell 1952; Heider 1958). It assumes that respondents are able to ascertain the beliefs and attitudes of elites outside their group and then infer that those elites with differing beliefs and attitudes constitute their opponents.

To measure beliefs of respondents, we used factor analysis to identify underlying belief clusters on two sections of the questionnaire. The structure of the questionnaire draws heavily upon certain assumptions concerning the nature of belief systems: that is, one needs first to distinguish between general beliefs and those specific to the policy area under investigation and, then, within each of those two categories, to distinguish among perceptions of the seriousness of various problems, underlying normative attitudes, and perceived causal relationships (Pierce and Lovrich 1980).

One section of the questionnaire consisted of seven-point Likert-scale items dealing with basic normative attitudes and causal perceptions related to environmental issues at Lake Tahoe. This produced two scales. The first — labeled Growth and Property Rights Normative Scale — is composed of five items dealing solely with underlying normative attitudes concerning the relative priority to be accorded economic growth, environmental quality, and property rights. The second scale — labeled Growth and Localism — consists of nine items dealing with the value priorities in the first scale plus a number of perceived causal relationships concerning (a) the support of different governmental levels for environmental quality and (b) the effects of housing and highway construction on erosion. Respondents’ linking of pro-growth with pro-local government replicates findings of other land use studies in Ohio and California (Coke and Brown 1976; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1980; 1981). Both scales are highly reliable, with alphas of at least .87 and factor loadings of at least .60. For the specific items and details of scale construction, see Appendix A.

Another section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate the perceived seriousness of eleven problems in the Tahoe Basin on a 100-point thermometer scale. A single factor analysis with varimax rotation produced two scales. One — which we have labeled Environmental Problems — consists of seven items dealing with urbanization, air pollution, water quality, open space, ugly buildings, etc. The second scale — labeled Economic Problems — consists of three items dealing with inadequate job and business opportunities, moderate income housing, and inadequate sewage facilities. Here, again, factor loadings exceeded .60, although the Economic Problems Scale was less reliable than the others (alpha of .65 compared to .88, .87, and .92). See Appendix A for details.

* Sewage facilities loads on the economic — rather than on the environmental — problems scale because, since the legal requirement that all sewage be collected and exported from the Basin by 1971, state and federal environmental agencies have sought to limit the expansion of sewage treatment facilities as a means of constraining economic growth in the Basin.
The next step in our analysis was to see where various groups concerned with the Basin fell on these scales. Although respondents may fit into more than one category, we used their principal organizational affiliation when dealing with Tahoe policy issues. Following are the relevant categories (with the number of respondents in parentheses):

1) State and federal officials; these are primarily agency staff but also a few elected officials from California, Nevada, and the Federal Government (n = 32);

2) Local government officials from the five Basin counties and the city of South Lake Tahoe; these are primarily staff, although a few elected officials also responded (n = 23);

3) Officials from the Public Utility Districts (PUDs) concerned with sewers in the Basin (n = 23);

4) Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) officials, i.e., members of the governing board, the principal staff, and members of the advisory planning commission (n = 29);\(^6\)

5) Members of the board of directors of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, the principal environmental interest group concerned with the Basin (n = 32); in 1984, the League had about 2000 members, two full-time staff, and a budget of about $90,000.

6) Members of the board of directors of the Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council, the principal property rights interest group concerned with the Basin (n = 18); in 1984, the Preservation Council had about 2000 members, three full-time staff, and a budget of about $200,000.

7) Members of the boards of directors of business interest groups, i.e. Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Realtors, in the Basin (n = 31);

8) Miscellaneous citizens, i.e. journalists, scientists, and other individuals (primarily former government and interest group officials) who showed up in minutes or newspaper stories, or were recommended as influentials (n = 26).

Figure 1 indicates the mean score for each of these groups on the four attitudinal scales. The pattern for the first three scales — Growth and Property Rights, Growth and Localism, and Environmental Problems — is virtually identical: the Preservation Council at one end, the League at the other, with businessmen and PUD officials as allies of the Preservation Council, while state and federal officials, miscellaneous citizens, and TRPA officials are relatively close to the League. Local government officials are generally in the middle, very close to the mean. ("Corrected mean" is the community mean with the two extreme opponents, the Preservation Council

\(^5\) A more precise way to put this would be to say that we have grouped respondents according to what we perceive to be their principal organizational affiliation. In all but a few cases, this is quite straightforward. In cases where individuals hold both a governmental and an interest group position, we generally viewed the former as more important.

\(^6\) There is some double-counting with respect to TRPA officials, as most board members and members of the advisory planning commission also hold positions in local or state government. Had we not counted them under the TRPA as well, the characterization of that agency would have been quite misleading — as it would be based upon the positions of the TRPA staff plus a few state appointees on the governing board.
and the League, excluded). The lineup is somewhat different on the Economic Problems Scale. Here local government officials are at one end, with the business community in the middle, and the League and its allies at the other extreme. As we shall see later, however, this scale does a much poorer job of predicting performance evaluations of various organizations and thus will be given less weight than the others.

The basic lineup of allies and opponents is thus quite clear. The League is at one extreme, with the Preservation Council at the other. State and federal officials, miscellaneous citizens, and TRPA officials are more moderate allies of the League in the "Environmental Coalition," while business
and PUD leaders are more moderate allies of the Preservation Council in the "Economic Growth/Property Rights coalition."

Local government officials present the only difficult case. While their responses on the first three scales suggest they are in the middle, their scores on the Economic Problems Scale suggest they probably lean toward the Economic Growth/Property Rights Coalition. And the historical record clearly indicates that elected local officials — who are underrepresented among respondents — have usually been part of that pro-growth coalition (Costantini and Hanf 1973; Strong 1984; Ingram and Sabatier 1986).

The implications from Hypothesis 4 are also quite clear: we would expect the League and the Preservation Council to be the most extreme opponents — and thus the most susceptible to impugning the motives of opponents, evaluating their behavior in very negative terms, or overestimating their power. Their respective allies would have less extreme views of opponents. It is to an examination of the findings on each of these three aspects of the devil shift that we now turn.

**Impugning the Motives and/or Reasonableness of Opponents**

Hypothesis 1 argues that opponents will question the legitimacy of each other’s motives while perceiving themselves to be acting out of concern for the public welfare. And Hypothesis 4 contends that the extent to which opponents’ motives and/or reasonableness are questioned will be a function of ideological distance.

In order to examine this topic, the questionnaire contained the following set of open-ended questions:

The League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council have been two of the most important interest groups in the Basin in the past 4-5 years. With respect to the League to Save Lake Tahoe, what do you perceive to be its basic goals? Whose interests does it represent?

With respect to the Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council, what are its basic goals? Whose interests does it represent?

The answers to these questions were recoded into a five-point scale for each organization. This new variable represents how respondents characterize each interest group, with a high score reflecting a negative evaluation, a middle score a neutral evaluation, and a low score a positive evaluation of the goals and interests of each organization.

The basic decision rule was to reserve the "negative" categories for those remarks which were clearly pejorative characterizations of the organization as representing extremists or people with hidden or illegitimate motives (examples are listed below). Ambiguous characterizations — e.g., of the Preservation Council as representing developers — were coded as "neutral." The "positive" categories were reserved for those comments which were clearly supportive and approving of the goals and interests of each organization — e.g. protecting the unique beauty of Lake Tahoe’s environment (League) or protecting the rights of individuals to build on their property (Preservation Council). The five-point variable works as follows: if all of the respondent’s comments regarding one of the interest groups were
negative (or positive), then that respondent received the maximum score of five (or one) for the characterization variable. If the respondent had some negative comments plus some neutral comments (or more negative than positive comments), then s/he received a score of four, implying that the answer was negative on balance. If the respondent made an equal number of positive and negative comments (or if the entire answer consisted of only neutral comments), then s/he would receive a neutral score of three.

Because we are most interested in respondents’ negative characterizations of the League and the Preservation Council, the following are some quotations from respondents which illustrate the sort of pejorative comments made about the goals and interests of the two groups:

Negative comments about the League to Save Lake Tahoe
(1) “Goal: to pull up the gangplank now that they each have their Tahoe place.”
(2) “Make Tahoe once again a rich man’s lake — their principal support comes from ‘fat cats’ with lake front homes, some of them built on [highly erodable land].”
(3) “Goal: to destroy the rights of property owners and residents through the taking of property by regional zoning rather than just compensation.”
(4) “Overzealous environmentalists who wish to stop growth, reduce the economy to a shambles, keep Tahoe pristine at all costs.”

Negative comments about the Tahoe-Sierra Preservation Council
(1) “To fund [their attorney’s] retirement; it benefits, you guessed it, [their attorney].”
(2) “Basic goals are simple — build, build, and build more. Preservation should be deleted from their title.”
(3) “Interests: ostensibly the small lot owner, but, in reality, the real estate, construction, and legal business interests who profit off continued fear and controversy involving those lot owners.”

This should give the reader some feel for the quality of invective at Tahoe.

Table 1 summarizes the data concerning the percentage of respondents from various organizations who gave negative characterizations of the motives and/or reasonableness of the League and the Preservation Council.

The data support the devil shift argument presented in Hypotheses 1 and 4. As expected, Preservation Council leaders had the most negative characterization of the motives and/or reasonableness of the League: 100 percent of the Preservation Council respondents had negative things to say about the League, followed by about 70 percent of the respondents from PUDs and business organizations. In contrast, none of the League directors characterized their own organization in negative terms, followed by about 22 percent of respondents from their allied organizations (e.g., state and federal agencies, the TRPA, and miscellaneous citizens). The only mild surprise was the high percentage (63 percent) of local government officials who questioned the motives and reasonableness of the League. This finding further confirmed evidence from the Economic Problem Scale that local government officials leaned more towards the Growth/Property Rights Coalition than the Environmental Coalition.
TABLE 1
NEGATIVE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE LEAGUE AND THE PRESERVATION COUNCIL
BY ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterization by Respondents Affiliated with Organizations in:</th>
<th>Growth/Property Rights Coalition*</th>
<th>Environmental Coalition*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preservation Chamber &amp; Local</td>
<td>PUD &amp; TRPA</td>
<td>Citizens &amp; State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Board</td>
<td>Realtor Officials</td>
<td>Geo. Officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 18)</td>
<td>(n = 31)</td>
<td>(n = 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization of the LEAGUE TO SAVE LAKE TAHOE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization of the PRESERVATION COUNCIL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>101%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* T-tests were conducted using the coalitions as groups. For characterizations of both the League and the Preservation Council, the tests were significant at the .001 level.

The characterizations of the Preservation Council were also consistent with the hypotheses. About 40 percent of the League and state and federal officials questioned the motives or reasonableness of the Preservation Council. Although only about 25 percent of TRPA officials and miscellaneous citizens (both of which are in the environmental Coalition) questioned the Preservation Council’s motives, this is still quite substantial compared to the approximately 9 percent of the leaders from the Preservation Council and its allies who had negative things to say.

Thus far we have been relying on the mean views of respondents from different categories of organizations. While these are of great political importance, the use of aggregate data may also weaken or mask relationships. They need to be supplemented by techniques using discrete individuals — irrespective of their organizational affiliation — as the focus of analysis. Toward this end, we can correlate individuals’ scores on the various attitudinal scales with their willingness to characterize the League and the Preservation Council, respectively, in negative terms. The results are presented in Table 2.

They are entirely consistent with the devil shift. For example, high scores on the (pro) Growth and Property Rights scale and on the (pro) Growth and Localism scale were associated with negative characterizations of the League to Save Lake Tahoe (r = .78), but with a reluctance to so characterize the Preservation Council (r = -.60). By the same token, high scores on the Environmental Problems scale were associated with a willingness to question the motives and reasonableness of the Preservation Council.
TABLE 2
CORRELATION OF RESPONSES ON ATTITUDINAL SCALES WITH NEGATIVE CHARACTERIZATIONS OF THE LEAGUE AND THE PRESERVATION COUNCIL

(Pearson r)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudinal Scale</th>
<th>Negative Characterization of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>League to Save Tahoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth and Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights Normative Scale</td>
<td>.78 (n = 186)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth and Localism Scale</td>
<td>.78 (n = 187)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Problems Scale</td>
<td>-.64 (n = 183)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Problems Scale</td>
<td>.22 (n = 181)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Negative characterization is a five-point scale with 5 = strongly negative, 3 = neutral, and 1 = strongly positive.
** = significant at .001 and .01, respectively. Since we are dealing with an (incomplete) census rather than a sample, however, these significance tests provide an indication of the probability that the relationship will withstand random measurement error in the independent variable.

(r = .43), but not the League (r = -.64). Correlations involving the Economic Problems scale were in the expected direction but of lower magnitude than with the other scales.

Evaluations of Opponents' Behavior

The previous section dealt with perceptions of opponents' motives or reasonableness. This section will discuss their behavior. Hypothesis 2 argues that actors will evaluate their opponents' behavior in more negative terms than most members of their policy community, while evaluating their own behavior in more favorable terms. And Hypothesis 4 contends that the harshness of these evaluations will be a function of ideological distance.

In order to examine this aspect of the devil shift, the questionnaire asked respondents to provide their evaluation of the overall performance of a number of interest groups and governmental agencies during the period from 1970 to 1984 with respect to the kind of Basin they would like to see. In short, respondents used their own evaluative criteria. The evaluations were on a 100-point thermometer scale where 100 represented an extremely good job and 0 an extremely poor job. The results are presented in Table 3.

The interest group data are remarkably consistent with the devil shift argument. In evaluating the performance of the Preservation Council, for example, the lowest scores came from the League (mean = 20) and the highest scores from the Preservation Council (mean = 57), compared to a community mean of 38. Precisely the reverse was true in evaluating the League's performance over the last fifteen years: the lowest scores came from the Preservation Council (mean = 17), the highest scores from the League itself (mean = 82), with a community mean of 52. In each case, business and PUD officials provided performance evaluations which were more moderate versions of the Preservation Council's, while state and federal officials, TRPA officials, and miscellaneous citizens mirrored the League's judg-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Being Evaluated</th>
<th>Growth/Property Rights Coalition*</th>
<th>Environmental Coalition*</th>
<th>Group Doing the Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservation Council Board (n=18)</td>
<td>Chamber &amp; Realtor Boards (n=31)</td>
<td>PUD Officials (n=23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Interest Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Property rights groups, e.g. the Sierra-Tahoe Preservation Council</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Land developers and builders</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Environmental interest groups, e.g. the League</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Governmental Agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Local government officials</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. TRPA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CTRPA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. U.S. Forest Service</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The corrected mean omits responses from the most extreme groups in each coalition, i.e. the League and the Preservation Council.

* T-tests were conducted and significant differences (at the .001 level) between coalitions were found in their evaluations of all eight organizations.
ments in more moderate form. Local government officials were generally in the middle, with very similar evaluations of both the League and the Preservation Council.

Turning now to evaluations of governmental agencies, here again the data are reasonably consistent with the devil shift. This is seen most clearly with respect to the more environmental agencies — the CTRPA and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board — which clearly carried the brunt of environmental regulation in the Basin during the 1974-80 period. In both cases, the evaluations from the Preservation Council and its allies were considerably below the community mean, while those from the Environmental Coalition were well above the mean. The pattern also held for local governments, which during this period were the favored agencies of the Growth/Property Rights Coalition.

The evaluations of TRPA performance were a little more mixed than one would predict from our attitudinal data, but this can probably be explained by the fact that during the 1970s — i.e., prior to the substantial revision of its legislative mandate in 1980 — the TRPA tried to follow a middle path between economic growth and environmental protection. This would account for its lower than expected scores from the League, for example. Finally, one should note that evaluations of the Forest Service — while they clearly varied by coalition — were by the large quite favorable (with the exception of respondents from the Preservation Council.) This is probably because the Forest Service’s role during this period was not to regulate private land development but rather to purchase (and manage) additional lands at approximately market value. Thus it was conserving policies in a manner which did not upset property rights activists.

As in the previous section, however, we need to supplement these observations based on organizational differences with techniques which use discrete individuals as the focus of analysis. Thus Table 4 provides the correlation coefficients (Pearson r) between individuals’ scores on the various attitudinal scales and their assessments of the performance of selected interest groups and agencies on the 100-point evaluative scales.

Two of the scales — (pro) Growth and Property Rights and (pro) Growth and Localism — are effective in predicting assessments of the performance of interest groups and of clearly environmental agencies such as the CTRPA and Lahontan Water Quality Board. They also are rather strongly correlated with assessments of local governments’ performance, revealing that most respondents viewed local governments to be part of the Economic Growth/Property Rights Coalition during these years. The correlations for the TRPA and the Forest Service were in the expected direction but somewhat weaker, probably for the reasons given above. Finally, the Perceived Environmental Problems Scale did a much better job of predicting evaluations than did its Economic Problems counterpart.

While these findings concerning negative evaluations of opponents’ behavior are worth documenting, they are less interesting than another aspect of the devil shift argument, i.e., that concerning misperceptions of influence.
TABLE 4
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCORES ON ATTITUDBAL SCALES AND EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS AND AGENCIES IN THE TAHOE BASIN, 1970-84

(Pearson r) | Attitudinal Scale | (pro) Growth and Property Rights (n = 188) | (pro) Growth and Localism (n = 189) | Perceived Environmental Problems (n = 184) | Perceived Economic Problems (n = 183)
---|---|---|---|---|---
A. Interest Groups | | | | | |
1. Property rights groups, e.g. Preservation Council | .42*** | .39*** | -.31*** | .30***
2. Land developers and builders | .33*** | .34*** | -.32*** | .20**
3. Environmental interest groups, e.g. League | -.76*** | -.77*** | .68*** | -.25***
B. Governmental Agencies | | | | | |
1. Local governments | .50*** | .52*** | -.44*** | .27***
2. TRPA | -.30*** | -.35** | .27*** | .04
3. CTRPA | -.65*** | -.68*** | .61*** | -.24***
4. Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board | -.58*** | -.59*** | .54*** | -.16*
5. U.S. Forest Service | -.38*** | -.39*** | .31*** | -.05

***, **, * = probability at (.001, .01, and .05 levels, respectively) that relationship will withstand random measurement error in the independent variable.

Perceptions of Opponents’ Influence

Hypothesis 3 argues that actors will overestimate their opponents’ influence and underestimate their own. Hypothesis 4 contends that the magnitude of the distortion will be a function of ideological distance. As will be recalled, these arguments are based upon theories dealing with negativity bias, the greater availability of information concerning opponents’ victories than their defeats, and the strategic interests of organizations in magnifying the power of their adversaries.

In order to examine this topic, the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the (perceived) influence of a variety of interest groups and governmental agencies during the 1980s on a 100-point scale, with 100 denoting an extremely influential group and 0 being a group with no influence at all.

Table 5 presents the findings concerning the perceived influence of a variety of interest groups and governmental agencies — arranged in a rough order with the Preservation Council at one extreme and the League at the other — by members of the two coalitions. The findings are rather mixed.

On the one hand, the “devil shift” argument holds quite well for members of the Growth/Property Rights Coalition. In virtually all cases, they rank their opponents as substantially more influential than themselves and their allies. The leaders of the Preservation Council, for example, gave themselves a mean influence score of 46 and their allies (developers and local governments) scores of 24 and 39, respectively. In contrast, their opponents in the League, CTRPA, Lahontan Board, and TRPA were assigned
scores between 70 and 85. The Forest Service was assigned a more moderate score of 52, but this is perfectly consistent with the "devil shift" argument — as the Forest Service was regarded as the most moderate member of the Environmental Coalition. The other members of the Growth/Property Rights Coalition — businessmen, PUD officials, and local government officials — likewise perceived their opponents to be much more influential than themselves and their allies.

The situation is much less clear when one turns to members of the Environmental Coalition. The "devil shift" holds in a few instances. For example, the leaders of the League to Save Lake Tahoe viewed developers as being the most influential actors in the Basin — a finding which becomes even clearer if one standardizes the scores on the influence scale.7 By and large, however, the members of this coalition (1) viewed the TRPA

7 If one uses standardized (z) scores, League leaders give developers an average score of +1.87. The next highest score is +.60 for the TRPA. Everybody else is bunched between +.40 and −1.33.

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TABLE 5
PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE
(mean response on a 100-point scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Influence Of:</th>
<th>Preservation Council (n = 18)</th>
<th>Businessmen (n = 31)</th>
<th>PUD Officials (n = 23)</th>
<th>Local Govt. Officials (n = 23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth/Property Rights Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Developers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Preservation Council</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Local Governments</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) USFS</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) TRPA</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Lahontan RWQCB</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) CTRPA</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) League</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Influence Of:</th>
<th>League to Save Lake Tahoe (n = 32)</th>
<th>State and Federal Officials (n = 32)</th>
<th>Citizens &amp; Misc. (n = 26)</th>
<th>TRPA Officials (n = 29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth/Property Rights Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Developers</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Preservation Council</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Local Governments</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) USFS</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) TRPA</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Lahontan RWQCB</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) CTRPA</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) League</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as the most influential organization in the Basin and (2) otherwise perceived their opponents and allies as having roughly similar amounts of influence during the 1980s.

The findings are similar when one shifts to individuals as the unit of analysis. As can be seen in Table 6, there are strong correlations between individuals’ scores on the attitudinal scales and their perceptions of the influence of members of the Growth/Property Rights coalition — i.e. the Preservation Council, developers, and local government officials. And the relationships are thoroughly consistent with the devil shift: people ranking high on the (pro) Growth and Property Rights Scales tended to view the Preservation Council, builders, and local governments as being relatively unimportant (negative correlation of at least moderate magnitudes), while there was strong positive correlation between the (pro) Environmental Problems Scale and the perceived influence of members of the Growth/Property Rights Coalition. When one turns to the perceived influence of members of the Environmental Coalition, the relationships are weaker but in the expected direction.

### TABLE 6
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCORES ON ATTITUDINAL SCALES AND PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE OF VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS AND AGENCIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Pearson r)</th>
<th>Attitudinal Scale</th>
<th>Perceived Influence OF:</th>
<th>Perceived Influence OF:</th>
<th>Perceived Influence OF:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(pro)</td>
<td>(pro)</td>
<td>(n = 188)</td>
<td>(n = 189)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growth and Property Rights</td>
<td>Growth and Property Rights</td>
<td>Localism</td>
<td>Environmental Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Growth/Prop. Rights Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Property rights groups, e.g. Preservation Council</td>
<td>-.41***</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>-.54***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Land developers and builders</td>
<td>-.62***</td>
<td>-.65***</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Local governments</td>
<td>-.48***</td>
<td>-.55***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Environmental Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. U.S. Forest Service</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. TRPA</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CTRPA</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Environmental interest groups, e.g. League</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***, **, * = Statistically significant at the .001, .01, and .05 levels.

In short, this aspect of the devil shift argument — that people will overestimate their opponents’ influence and underestimate their own — seems to work very well when the Growth/Property Rights/Localism Coalition is the object of attention but much less so when the Environmental Coalition is the focus of analysis.
After exploring a number of possible reasons for this asymmetry, the most plausible explanation is suggested by data in Table 5. Note that the high scores for the groups — irrespective of the coalition — varied only slightly, basically falling between 68 and 85. But the low scores varied a great deal: whereas the low scores for members of the Environmental Coalition never fell below 52 (and were usually around 60), the members of the Growth/Localism Coalition were much more pessimistic about their own influence, with the lows generally in the 40s and falling as far as 19.

This situation is probably explicable in terms of a mixture of reality and fear. On the one hand, the Environmental Coalition won so many headline-grabbing victories in the early 1980s — the 1980 revision of the TRPA Compact, the 1980 approval of a very stringent erosion control plan, the approval of rather stringent environmental thresholds by the TRPA in 1982, the April 1984 injunction resulting from the League’s lawsuit — that there were severe reality constraints limiting the extent to which members of that coalition could have underestimated their own influence. On the other hand, they could continue to overestimate the influence of their opponents: developers and local governments had arguably dominated Basin politics until the mid-to-late 1970s, and they could plausibly do so again. In environmentalists’ eyes, “Money can wait, and the locals will always be in charge of implementing most policies; thus time is on their side.”

For members of the Growth/Property Rights Coalition, however, their influence was shrouded in the normal degree of uncertainty: during the early 1980s, their victories were subtle and some of their defeats were manifest. Thus they could plausibly continue to overestimate the power of opponents while underestimating their own.

There is, however, one noteworthy point shared by members of both coalitions: perceptions of opponents’ influence in each case were only modestly correlated with negative characterizations of opponents’ motives

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8 Three alternative explanations for the asymmetry were considered but rejected:
(1) Differences in the amount of experience with various organizations, i.e. one might expect the devil shift to operate more strongly with respect to the influence of new organizations because they haven’t yet had time to develop a track record. This does not, however, explain variation at Tahoe, since all of the groups — with the exception of the Preservation Council — had been around for at least a decade at the time of the survey.
(2) Governing vs. minority coalition. Data from the 1971 Michigan cross-national elite survey suggested that while the two coalitions agreed on the power of the minority coalition, they disagreed concerning the power of the majority coalition, at least in Britain and the German Federal Republic (Marwick 1985: Exhibit 3). While plausible, this hypothesis doesn’t work at Tahoe. For one thing, in the early 1980s there was no clear governing coalition and, insofar as there was one, it would have been the environmentalists. As can be seen in Table 5, however, at Tahoe the greatest variance in perceived power concerned the minority coalition.
(3) Conservatism. There is plausible argument that conservatives’ more pessimistic view of the nature of man makes them more susceptible to seeing their opponents as devils, an argument receiving some indirect support from the “left shift” studies of Brady and Sniderman (1985). At Tahoe, however, a partial correlation analysis controlling for conservatism made very little difference on the coefficients found in Table 6.

9 While these are recurring themes in interviews with environmentalists, we have no systematic data on this topic.
or negative evaluations of their behavior.\textsuperscript{10} At Tahoe, then, not all aspects of the devil shift argument were strongly interrelated. Perceptions’ of opponents’ influence were largely independent of assessments of their motivations or behavior.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

One of the basic requirements of theories of rationality is that actors be able to assess some of the more important consequences of a few alternatives in choice situations. Included in this calculus should be estimates of the goals and resources of opponents — for these will largely determine when it is advisable to contest opponents and the expenditure of resources required to produce a reasonable probability of success.

Despite these incentives for accurately assessing the goals and resources of one’s opponents and allies, there is a considerable body of literature in political psychology suggesting the actors tend — particularly in high conflict situations — to regard their opponents as more mean-spirited and powerful than they actually are, and to regard one’s allies as less powerful than they are.

This paper has examined the evidence for such a devil shift in the context of the long-standing controversy involving land use and water quality policy in the Lake Tahoe Basin. We have found considerable evidence that actors do, in fact: (1) question the legitimacy of their opponents’ motives and/or reasonableness; (2) evaluate their opponents’ behavior in harsher terms than do most members of their policy community; and, to a lesser extent (3) perceive their opponents to be more powerful, and themselves less powerful, than is probably the case. In addition, the extent of ideological distance between opponents appears to be a major factor affecting the extent of “devil shift.” On the other hand, perceptions of influence apparently do not affect assessments of motives or evaluations of behavior.

One should, of course, be careful about generalizing from these results. In the first place, one would not expect the devil shift to operate as strongly in lower conflict situations, in large part because the extent of ideological differences would presumably be less.

Second, the evidence on the most interesting aspect of the argument — concerning misperceptions of influence — was somewhat mixed. Nevertheless, evidence from this study, as well as more truncated analyses of public lands politics in the U.S. (Culhane 1981; Davis and Davis 1985) and elite survey data from Germany and Britain (Marvick 1985), indicate that elites either overestimate the influence of their opponents or perceive them to be as influential as do other members of the policy community.

\textsuperscript{10} We ran several multivariate path analyses looking at the effects of ideological orientation, perceived influence, and negative characterization on evaluations of a group’s behavior. With respect to the Preservation Council, perceptions of its influence were (a) unrelated to negative characterizations of its motives (beta = .00) and (b) only weakly related to evaluations of its behavior (beta = -.14). With respect to the League, perceptions of its influence were modestly related to (a) negative characterizations of its motives (beta = .10) and (b) to evaluations of its behavior (beta = -.12).
There exist, to our knowledge, no studies indicating that elites in reasonably high conflict situations perceive their opponents to be less influential than do other members of the policy community. In short, while the evidence is far from conclusive, a trend is beginning to appear.

A third caveat is in order because this paper has been concerned almost exclusively with ideological explanations for misperceptions of goals and influence. There are at least two alternative (or supplementary) factors which need to be investigated. First, the work of Sullivan et al. (1979, 1981) on tolerance suggests that personality type may be an important factor affecting one’s willingness to view opponents as reasonable people rather than casting them in very negative terms. A second factor which may be important is one’s institutional role. There is some evidence from this study that civil servants were less willing to question the legitimacy of people with quite different beliefs than were elected officials or interest group leaders. Unfortunately, civil servants comprised such a small percentage of the Tahoe policy community that we did not feel comfortable making that a major part of our argument.11

The devil shift should be of interest to scholars concerned with public policy as well as those interested in political behavior. For one of the most striking characteristics of policy-making in the Tahoe Basin — and, in fact, the reason we became interested in this topic — is that the devil shift has all the worst features of a positive feedback loop: the more one views opponents as malevolent and very powerful, the more likely one is to resort to questionable measures to preserve one’s interests. But the more one does so, the greater the probability opponents will start perceiving one as a very wicked character, thus resorting to unscrupulous countermeasures, thus further confirming one’s perception of them as “devils.” Suspicion and conflict escalate, and it becomes very difficult to break the cycle.

In this paper, we have tried to present the theoretical rationale for the devil shift argument; to examine it systematically in a particular situation; and to suggest a few avenues for future research. We hope our efforts will stimulate additional work on this surprisingly neglected topic.

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11 Actually, we examined two different arguments concerning the effect of institutional role on respondents’ willingness to question the legitimacy of opponents’ motives and/or reasonableness. The first was a simple distinction between government and non-governmental officials, on the assumption that governmental officials would be forced to expose themselves to varied points of view more than interest group officials (who spend most of their time talking to allies; see Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, 1972; Hayes, 1981). To our surprise this has no effect on respondents’ willingness to question the motives/reasonableness of either the League or the Preservation Council. Thus we tried a second distinction, between agency staff (civil servants) on the one hand and board members, elected officials, and non-governmental people, on the other. Here we found substantial differences: Whereas 9% of civil servants made negative comments about the League, 53% of non-civil servants did so. With respect to the Preservation Council, the comparable percentages were 18% and 24%. But since there were only 22 civil servants among 198 respondents, we didn’t feel justified in including this discussion in the text.
APPENDIX A: SCALE CONSTRUCTION

The attitudinal scales utilized in this paper were constructed from three separate factor analyses. The analytical strategy (of three separate runs) was motivated by a priori theoretical assumptions concerning the structure of elite belief systems which argued for separating (1) perceptions of the seriousness of various problems, (2) purely normative assertions, and (3) perceptions of causal relations (Sabatier and Hunter 1986). We explicitly rejected the alternative strategy of putting all items into a single run.

The first involved a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation on eleven perceived problems in the Tahoe Basin on a 100-point scale from 100 = extremely serious problem to 0 = not a problem at all. The analysis produced two separate scales. The first, which we term the Environmental Problems Scale, includes the following items and factor loadings:

- Urbanization, e.g., too many people, buildings, cars (r = .86);
- Air pollution (r = .85);
- Loss of open space (r = .84);
- Degradation of the quality of Tahoe water (r = .83);
- Visual pollution, i.e., ugly buildings, billboards (r = .71);
- Traffic congestion (r = .61);
- Shortage of public recreation areas (r = .54).

A reliability analysis produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .88.

The same factor analysis produced a second scale which we have labeled, Economic Problems Scale. Following are the items and factor loadings:

- Inadequate jobs/business opportunities (r = .82);
- A shortage of moderate priced housing (r = .78);
- Inadequate sewage disposal, treatment, exportation facilities (r = .65).

A reliability analysis resulted in an alpha of .65. Of the eleven possible items, the only one which did not fit on one of these two scales was one dealing with adverse social effects (e.g. drug use, damage to rental property) from a high percentage of transients.

A second factor analysis dealt with six purely normative items, all of them on 7-point Likert scales. Five of them formed the following scale, Growth and Property Rights:

- There is too much concern for restricting growth in the Basin and not enough concern for encouraging it (r = .87);
- We cannot afford to let policies claiming to promote “environmental quality” prevent continued economic development in the Basin (r = .86);
- Protection of water quality requires that regulations be rigorously enforced, even when they create hardships for property owners (r = –.79);
- All things considered, the gaming industry is of great benefit to the Tahoe Basin (r = .79);
- When environmental controls at Lake Tahoe place heavy burdens on individual property owners, special exceptions should be made (r = .71).

A reliability analysis produced an alpha of .87.
A final factor analysis involved sixteen Likert-scale items pertaining to a series of normative and/or causal statements dealing with the Tahoe Basin. The analysis resulted in two scales, one of which, the Growth and Localism Scale, was used in this analysis. Following are the items and factor loadings:

There is too much concern for restricting growth in the Basin and not enough for encouraging it \( (r = .77) \);
Clear environmental standards are necessary because local officials cannot be trusted to make the hard choices which risk harming their constituents \( (r = -.73) \);
We cannot afford to let policies claiming to promote "environmental quality" prevent continued economic development in the Basin \( (r = .72) \);
The Tahoe Basin is a resource of importance to people beyond the local level, and thus should be subjected to state and federal involvement \( (r = -.71) \);
All things considered, the gaming industry is of great benefit to the Tahoe Basin \( (r = .70) \);
Region-wide planning is necessary for the Tahoe Basin \( (r = -.69) \);
Housing construction in the Tahoe Basin has caused only minor erosion problems \( (r = .69) \);
There is too much erosion caused by highway construction \( (r = -.68) \);
Protection of water quality requires that regulations be vigorously enforced, even when they create hardships for property owners \( (r = -.68) \).

A reliability analysis on these items produced an alpha of .92.

In constructing the scales, we followed two procedures: First, in order to both retain the weightings and to keep the underlying Likert-scale/thermometer metric, we used weightings for each item which were a percentage of that item's factor loading compared to the loading of the best-fit item on that scale. Had we followed the normal procedure of using factor score coefficients, we would have been forced to use standardized data and thus lost the underlying metric. Second, in dealing with missing data, we decided to retain those respondents who answered a majority of scale items; missing responses to the remaining items were simply deleted. We did not follow the alternative procedure of substituting the means because it has the unfortunate effect of reducing the variance and thus artificially inflating correlation coefficients and F's.

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