

1: Information effects in collective preferences – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Collective Preferences in Democratic Politics is an important and timely contribution to this debate that will be of interest to both public opinion specialists, and more general students of democratic theory and practice.

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: *Opinion Surveys and the Will of the People*. Cambridge University Press, ; pp Invoking "the people" is an old rhetorical approach in politics. Furthermore, in the United [End Page] States, a place of perceived social equality, references to what Americans think may have an enhanced effect. As Tocqueville wrote, "The nearer men are to a common level of uniformity, the less they are inclined to believe blindly in any man of any class. But they are readier to trust the mass, and public opinion becomes more and more mistress of the world. Whether or not we would wish citizens and politicians to follow surveys, these numerical indicators suggest that public opinion can be discerned. Althaus, an associate professor of speech communication and political science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, brings to his task a vibrant multidisciplinary perspective. The book provides a systematic, rigorous, and careful empirical analysis that disputes scholars who have concluded that holding minimal information can nonetheless lead to reasonable political assessments. Althaus examines the differences political knowledge makes. One impact is on overall reports of public opinion. Those who answer questions are more apt to be male, wealthier, better educated, and more partisan than those who do not, and their views have a disproportionate impact on survey results. The politically advantaged thus speak with a louder voice than is fair. The core method involves simulating the impact of having knowledge on political views, by comparing actually surveyed opinion to the opinions that would have been held by the population if everyone were well-informed, or "fully informed. These gaps, or "information effects," vary by issue and over time. For example, Althaus finds a small "information effect" in views toward job discrimination toward gays in , a larger one in , and a little one in Althaus grounds his empirical analysis in democratic theory as well as contemporary debates about the meaning of public opinion and the usefulness of surveys for understanding public views. For one, Althaus relies on an operationalization of "fully informed" opinion, which is rather general. A person is "fully informed" if she can do such things as identify the office held by certain politicians and the issue stances of the major parties. This approach does not capture whether the person answering the question is informed about the subject of the questions, nor does it take into account the tendency for social group members to be especially cognizant of issues that affect their group. As Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter note in *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*, "[M]ost citizens are political generalists, meaning that those who are knowledgeable about one subject of politics tend to be knowledgeable about others, but some

2: Democratic Collective Centralism - Wikipedia

2 Collective Preferences in Democratic Politics political theorists since the time of Plato and Aristotle (Minar), the recent tendency toward equating public opinion with the results of opin-

He could not have foreseen that four decades later, the advent of survey research would make it possible to measure opinion on a daily basis. Yet nearly seventy years since the development of survey research, this is where we find ourselves. Althaus not only recognizes the ubiquity of polling and the fact that opinion surveys have gained acceptance as the voice of the people, but he also asks a question that is not dissimilar to the one Bryce raised more than a century ago: Few social scientists would disagree with Althaus that this problem is pervasive. Studies beginning in the mids have shown dismally low levels of knowledge about government and politics. But Althaus is not just concerned with the low levels of knowledge; he also points to the fact that certain types of people are better informed than others. As a matter of fact, this point has been raised by other scholars, which Althaus acknowledges when he cites Philip Converse: He thus poses a critical question about the way we measure opinion today: Given the low levels of knowledge and group differences, can we or should we trust opinion polls to represent the public and tell us what it wants? Althaus is not the first to acknowledge these problems or their impact on the representativeness of opinion polls. His conclusion that knowledge can bias the results of opinion surveys and render them at times nonrepresentative of the majority will, however, is groundbreaking because it challenges prevalent theories of public opinion. While few scholars have argued that the general lack of knowledge is irrelevant, until now the literature has largely embraced one of two arguments, both of which discount the impact of low levels of knowledge on survey findings. The first line of argument posits that the aggregated responses of the ill informed tend to cancel each other out and thus generate meaningful opinion. According to the second argument, citizens compensate for their lack of knowledge by using online processing and various information shortcuts. As Althaus accurately points out, however, neither conclusion is fully supported by the evidence. While people can use shortcuts, for instance, there is little evidence to show that they in fact do. Moreover, both of these perspectives fail to address what Althaus sees as an even greater problem, the fact that knowledge is unevenly distributed. In chapter 2, for instance, he employs a computer simulation of 28, unique opinion distributions to challenge a common hypothesis in the collective opinion literature that suggests that the process of aggregation reveals the preferences of the informed public. The fact that he relies heavily on data gathered during presidential elections, when respondents are likely to have higher levels of knowledge, serves to buttress his argument even further. To the contrary, he proposes thoughtful solutions designed to help pollsters, consultants, journalists, and political leaders avoid these problems. None of the reforms he recommends require a great deal of effort or vast expenditures. He suggests, for instance, that pollsters include knowledge questions in surveys as a means of estimating the quality of collective preferences. Likewise, those who report results are encouraged to do so in ways that draw attention to the issues of quality and representation. To his credit, Althaus is equally critical of those who suggest that surveys should be taken at face value as accurate measures of the will of the people as he is of those who dismiss polls as vacuous. Instead of either dismissing or blindly embracing polling, Althaus considers a different question: How should they be used? Althaus argues that surveys are most appropriately used to collect information about goals rather than means, values rather than preferences, and problems rather than solutions. If this sounds somewhat familiar, it should. After an exhaustive and compelling analysis of the relationship between knowledge, representation, and equality in surveys, Althaus concludes with a discussion that sounds remarkably like that of Harwood Childs nearly forty years earlier. Nature, Formation, and Role, Childs , p. It serves as an important reminder that opinion polls are indeed limited in their usefulness as mirrors of the public mind. This is not due primarily to shortcomings in the methods of survey research, however, but to the fact that citizens themselves are limited in terms of their levels of knowledge. Althaus should be applauded for refocusing attention on these limitations and examining how low levels of knowledge and variations in knowledge bias opinion surveys. While some of the methodological portions of the text may be too sophisticated for lower-level undergraduate students, it is a

must-read for producers, reporters, and consumers of opinion data, as well as all students of democratic government.

Pro bowl media guide The handbook of visual analysis Castaway Christmas Directions of Change in Rural Egypt The american heritage dictionary of idioms by christine ammer Rabbini Judaism in the Making Ten-year view of public attitudes toward television and other mass media, 1959-1968 US foreign policy in the Middle East Great expectations character list Social relations in the Mahdhis city Economic geology of the Copper Mountain supracrustal belt, Owl Creek Mountains, Fremont County, Wyoming New Brunswick, and other poems The Enforcement Of Directors Duties In Britain And Germany Reading ancient texts Jefferson Kinder. Useful life skills to help professionals Augustinian just war theory and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq Beyond transfer of training : using multiple lenses to assess community education programs Judith M. Otto Dresden volume 1 your story torrent The Japanese tax treaty (T. Doc. 108-14 and the Sri Lanka tax protocol (T. Doc. 108-9) How to make your mark Montgomery County, in Microexam II Users Guide This market needs regulation From the pope to the council Brief multidimensional students life satisfaction scale Groundwater hydrology 3rd edition Natural history and human evolution [by Olive T. Miller. Elastic And Elastoplastic Contact Analysis Living science class 4 The United Nations and Apartheid Jazz guitar lesson Foreword Joshua Harris Denver outsiders : diversity and difference Jim Henderson Infinite Abelian Groups Greater Manchester Street Atlas (OS Philips Street Atlases) Force and destiny unlimited power II. Italian Renaissance sculpture. Frueh on the theatre Dsc maxsys user manual