

Chapter 1 : Measuring and Influencing Public Opinion

Reading Public Opinion offers one provocative approach for understanding how public opinion fits into the empirical world of politics. In fact, Susan Herbst finds that public opinion, surprisingly, has little to do with the mass public in many instances.

See Article History Public opinion, an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community. Some scholars treat the aggregate as a synthesis of the views of all or a certain segment of society; others regard it as a collection of many differing or opposing views. Writing in , the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley emphasized public opinion as a process of interaction and mutual influence rather than a state of broad agreement. The American political scientist V. The influence of public opinion is not restricted to politics and elections. It is a powerful force in many other spheres, such as culture , fashion, literature and the arts, consumer spending, and marketing and public relations. Contrasting understandings of public opinion have taken shape over the centuries, especially as new methods of measuring public opinion have been applied to politics, commerce, religion , and social activism. Political scientists and some historians have tended to emphasize the role of public opinion in government and politics, paying particular attention to its influence on the development of government policy. Indeed, some political scientists have regarded public opinion as equivalent to the national will. In such a limited sense, however, there can be only one public opinion on an issue at any given time. Sociologists , in contrast, usually conceive of public opinion as a product of social interaction and communication. According to this view, there can be no public opinion on an issue unless members of the public communicate with each other. Even if their individual opinions are quite similar to begin with, their beliefs will not constitute a public opinion until they are conveyed to others in some form, whether through print media, radio, television, the Internet, or telephone or face-to-face conversation. Sociologists also point to the possibility of there being many different public opinions on a given issue at the same time. Although one body of opinion may dominate or reflect government policy, for example, this does not preclude the existence of other organized bodies of opinion on political topics. The sociological approach also recognizes the importance of public opinion in areas that have little or nothing to do with government. The very nature of public opinion, according to the American researcher Irving Crespi , is to be interactive, multidimensional, and continuously changing. Thus, fads and fashions are appropriate subject matter for students of public opinion, as are public attitudes toward celebrities or corporations. Nearly all scholars of public opinion, regardless of the way they may define it, agree that, in order for a phenomenon to count as public opinion, at least four conditions must be satisfied: Politicians and publicists, for example, seek ways to influence voting and purchasing decisions, respectivelyâ€”hence their wish to determine any attitudes and opinions that may affect the desired behaviour. It is often the case that opinions expressed in public differ from those expressed in private. Some viewsâ€”even though widely sharedâ€”may not be expressed at all. Thus, in a totalitarian state, a great many people may be opposed to the government but may fear to express their attitudes even to their families and friends. In such cases, an antigovernment public opinion necessarily fails to develop. Historical background Antiquity Although the term public opinion was not used until the 18th century, phenomena that closely resemble public opinion seem to have occurred in many historical epochs. The ancient histories of Babylonia and Assyria, for example, contain references to popular attitudes, including the legend of a caliph who would disguise himself and mingle with the people to hear what they said about his governance. The prophets of ancient Israel sometimes justified the policies of the government to the people and sometimes appealed to the people to oppose the government. In both cases, they were concerned with swaying the opinion of the crowd. And in the classical democracy of Athens, it was commonly observed that everything depended on the people, and the people were dependent on the word. Wealth, fame, and respectâ€”all could be given or taken away by persuading the populace. By contrast Plato found little of value in public opinion, since he believed that society should be governed by philosopher-kings whose wisdom far exceeded the knowledge and intellectual capabilities of the general population. Phenomena much like public opinion, however, could still be observed

among the religious, intellectual, and political elite. Religious disputations, the struggles between popes and the Holy Roman Empire, and the dynastic ambitions of princes all involved efforts to persuade, to create a following, and to line up the opinions of those who counted. From the end of the 13th century, the ranks of those who could be drawn into controversy regarding current affairs grew steadily. The general level of education of the lay population gradually increased. The rise of humanism in Italy led to the emergence of a group of writers whose services were eagerly sought by princes striving to consolidate their domains. Some of these writers served as advisers and diplomats; others were employed as publicists because of their rhetorical skills. The 16th-century Italian writer Pietro Aretino – of whom it was said that he knew how to defame, to threaten, and to flatter better than all others – was sought by both Charles V of Spain and Francis I of France. The invention of printing from movable type in the 15th century and the Protestant Reformation in the 16th further increased the numbers of people able to hold and express informed opinions on contemporary issues. The German priest and scholar Martin Luther broke with the humanists by abandoning the use of Classical Latin, which was intelligible only to the educated, and turned directly to the masses. His vituperative style and the criticism he received from his many opponents, both lay and clerical, contributed to the formation of larger and larger groups holding opinions on important matters of the day. Opinions were also swayed by means of speeches, sermons, and face-to-face discussions. Not surprisingly, some civil and religious authorities attempted to control the dissemination of unwelcome ideas through increasingly strict censorship. Charles IX of France decreed in that nothing could be printed without the special permission of the king. More quietly but more significantly, other means of distributing information were becoming a common part of life. Regular postal services, started in France in and in the Austrian Empire in , facilitated the spread of information enormously. Rudimentary private news services had been maintained by political authorities and wealthy merchants since Classical times, but they were not available to the general public. Regularly printed newspapers first appeared about and multiplied rapidly thereafter, though they were frequently bedeviled by censorship regulations. The great European news centres began to develop during the 17th century, especially in cities that were establishing sophisticated financial exchanges, such as Antwerp, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, London, and Lyons. With the introduction of a paid civil service and the employment of paid soldiers in the place of vassals, princes found it necessary to borrow money. The bankers, in turn, had to know a great deal about the credit of the princes, the state of their political fortunes, and their reputations with their subjects. The 18th century to the present Significantly, it was another financial official who first popularized the term public opinion in modern times. Jacques Necker, the finance minister for Louis XVI on the eve of the French Revolution, noted repeatedly in his writings that public credit depended upon the opinions of holders and buyers of government securities about the viability of the royal administration. He too was vitally concerned with the *ditta di borsa*. But he also remarked on the power of public opinion in other areas. Necker was not, however, concerned with the opinions of each and every Frenchman. The final years of the 18th century showed how enormously the power of public opinion had grown. In France, public opinion had inspired both the middle classes and the urban masses and had ultimately taken shape as the French Revolution. Observers of the Revolution were mystified – and often terrified – by this new spectre, which seemed able to sweep aside one of the most-entrenched institutions of the time – the monarchy. In keeping with theories of social class developed in the 19th century, some scholars of the era viewed public opinion as the domain of the upper classes. Thus, the English author William A. There is no doubt that public opinion was on the minds of the great thinkers and writers of the era. The German philosopher G. Hegel described public opinion as containing both truth and falsehood and added that it was the task of the great man to distinguish between the two. The English jurist and historian James Bryce, writing in the late 19th and the early 20th century, maintained that a government based on popular consent would give a nation great stability and strength but did not believe that public opinion could or should determine the details of policy, since in his view most people do not have the leisure or inclination to arrive at a position on every question. Rather, the masses would set the general tone for policy, their sentiments leading them to take a stand on the side of justice, honour, and peace. Various theories of public opinion have been developed since the early 20th century, though none has been recognized as predominant. According to a framework suggested by the Canadian communications theorist Sherry

Devereux Ferguson, most of them fall into one or the other of three general categories. Some theories proposed in the first half of the 20th century treat public opinion as a welling up from the bottom levels of society to the top, ensuring a two-way flow of communication between representatives and the represented. Reflecting a more pessimistic outlook, theories belonging to a third category, known as critical or radical-functionalist, hold that the general public—“including minority groups”—has negligible influence on public opinion, which is largely controlled by those in power. This perspective, however, has been challenged by those who recognize a persistent plurality of views in democracies, evidenced most recently by the flourishing of public discourse through the Internet and other new media. The formation and change of public opinion No matter how collective views those held by most members of a defined public coalesce into public opinion, the result can be self-perpetuating. The French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, observed that once an opinion Alexis de Tocqueville, detail of an oil painting by T. Roger-Viollet has taken root among a democratic people and established itself in the minds of the bulk of the community, it afterwards persists by itself and is maintained without effort, because no one attacks it. Page 1 of 5.

Chapter 2 : Reading Public Opinion : Susan Herbst :

netw rks There's More Online about public opinion and government. Lesson 1 Forming Public Opinion Lesson 2 The Mass Media Lesson 3 Interest Groups and Lobbying Members of the American Federation of.

According to historian Robert Gellately, Hitler and his henchmen did not want to cower the German people as a whole into submission, but to win them over by building on popular images, cherished ideals, and long held phobias in the country. They expended an enormous amount of energy and resources to track public opinion and to win over people. Hitler created the new ministry on March 13, 1933, and put Joseph Goebbels in charge. They changed street names and other public signage to erase reminders of the Weimar Republic. They organized party rallies and dramatic torch-lit parades to demonstrate public support. Writing in *Defying Hitler*, journalist Sebastian Haffner described these demonstrations and recalled the effect they had on many Germans. It started with a huge victory celebration before the elections on March 4 [see reading, *Outlawing the Opposition*]. These elections, the last that were ever held in prewar Germany, brought the Nazis only 44 percent of the votes in the previous elections they had achieved 37 percent. The majority was still against the Nazis. Hitler swearing loyalty to something or other for the nth time, bells tolling, a solemn procession to church by the members of the Reichstag, a military parade, swords lowered in salute, children waving flags, and a torchlight parade. The colossal emptiness and lack of meaning of these never-ending events was by no means unintentional. The population should become used to cheering and jubilation, even when there was no visible reason for it. The weather in March was glorious. Was it not wonderful to celebrate in the spring sunshine, in squares decked with flags? To merge with the festive crowds and listen to high-sounding patriotic speeches, about freedom and fatherland, exaltation and holy vows? New words keep turning up, or old ones acquire new specialist meanings, or new combinations are formed which rapidly [harden] into stereotypes. This is an ominous translation into German: And where are they within Germany itself? Meanwhile the boycott of Jewish shops and doctors is in the offing. One could draw up a dictionary of the new language. Yet again a new opportunity for celebration, a new national holiday for the people: Volkfest festival of the people, Volksgenosse comrade of the people, Volksgemeinschaft community of the people, volksnah one of the people, volksfremd alien to the people, volksenstammt descended from the people Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany Oxford: A Holocaust Reader, ed. Peter Hayes Lincoln, NE: Oliver Pretzel New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998, 29” According to historian Robert Gellately, Hitler and his henchmen did not want to cower the German people as a whole into submission, but to win them over by building on popular images, cherished ideals, and long held phobias in the country Propaganda is biased or misleading information that is used to influence public opinion. It started with a huge victory celebration before the elections on March 4. The population should become used to cheering and jubilation, even when there was no visible reason for it Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler*: Oxford University Press, 2002, vii. Penguin, 2002, University of Nebraska Press, 2002, excerpt from *Defying Hitler*: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, 29” Connection Questions Why do you think that public opinion was important to the Nazis? How did they go about winning support from the German public? What chance would one feel one had against that monolith of power? Which emotions were useful to the Nazis in building acceptance and support for their regime? How did the Nazis use language to shape public opinion? How did they try to influence what Germans thought about, remembered, or forgot through their choice of words? What part did the truth play in these efforts? According to Haffner, how did the Nazis attempt to influence the outcome of the elections? How do the actions and opinions of your peer group influence your own actions and opinions? Citations 6 Doris L.

Chapter 3 : Measuring Public Opinion [www.nxgvision.com]

The media's use of public opinion data has a long history. The press depends on polls as a source of information for its stories, and polling organizations need the media to publicize their results.

But what is public opinion, anyway? How do we form our opinions, where do they come from, and how do government officials use it? Can the press, or the Internet, provide us the knowledge we need to make informed opinions? The following is a paper originally written for my course in the Manship School of Mass Communication. Public Opinion consists of those pictures collectively acted upon. Fictions and symbols become an important part of human communication in a world of complex, distant and unseen events. People form mental images of events they do not experience and attach emotions to those images. Indirect, imagined, symbolic and stereotyped pictures of facts form the basis of public opinion. Censorship and privacy intercept information at its source, forming barriers between the public and events. Physical and social barriers, monopolies, low incomes and lack of interest limit the circulation of ideas. Language becomes a limiting factor as words elicit different mental images and have different meanings for different people. Time constraints, distractions of urban life, emotional conflicts and fatigue also limit access to facts. In Parts three and four, Lippmann explores how stereotypes and self-interest guide public opinion, how images, preconceptions and prejudices affect incoming messages from the outside. People use their prejudices to interpret and fill out these messages. In a complex world, people perceive events and other people in forms stereotyped for them by their culture. They accept stereotypes as mental shortcuts in order to minimize effort of thought and defend their positions in society and their self-respect. Moral codes, social philosophies and political agitations contribute to the stereotyped shapes that influence perceptions. People see those facts that fit their moral philosophy, support their stereotypes and compliment their variable interests. He discusses the role of vague ideas and universal symbols in uniting deeply felt individual opinions. Lippmann equates this harmonization to a hierarchy of symbols. A higher order symbol collects more diverse ideas into a common emotional response while sacrificing concrete intellectual substance. Each individual gives the symbol his or her own private meaning. As authoritative figures begin to wield uniting symbols, men choose less between true and false and more between trustworthy and untrustworthy. They exercise their independence not through self-sufficiency but in controlling which authorities they listen to. In Part six, Lippmann analyzes democratic theory of public opinion in its traditional and reformed forms. In popular government, men act without reliable pictures of the world. Lippmann points out that, despite hopes, the press will not provide the spontaneous knowledge of truth and self-governing ability required of the individual in a representative government.

Chapter 4 : Public opinion | www.nxgvision.com

Drawing on ideas from political science, sociology and psychology this text explores how three sets of political participants - legislative staffers, political activists and journalists - actually evaluate and assess public opinion.

These important liberties allow individuals in our country to receive information and develop opinions about topics of importance. Once an individual has a basic set of beliefs, they usually find there are others who share the same views. When a large group of people shares the same belief on a political topic, it is called public opinion. The government wants to know how people feel about many different subjects. So do interest groups, political parties, candidates for office, and the media. They gather this information through polls. Polls must be properly worded, ordered, and timed to be accurate. It is very easy to word and order questions to influence the person being polled. Because there have been problems in the past, there are independent groups that now set the standards for polls. They help to make sure questions are specific and detailed so that precise results are obtained. In addition, public opinion can change rapidly, especially on new issues that arise. Therefore, polls must be timed appropriately. When an issue first arises, it is usually best to allow some time to pass before taking a poll. This gives people the time to process information about the issue before expressing their opinion. When properly formatted and conducted, polls give people a way to express their opinions in order for beliefs to be measured. Using mathematics and statistics, pollsters can determine how to gather accurate information. However, polls are never one hundred percent accurate. All include a scientifically calculated margin of error. The sample of people chosen must reflect the larger picture. For example, the government might want to know what senior citizens think about their health care. The poll would include questions related to how people over sixty-five feel about the care they receive. It may also include what kind of care they receive on a regular basis and general questions such as income and gender. The sample should include enough people to represent the senior population at large. Paragraphs 4 to 7: For the complete story with questions:

Chapter 5 : Reading Public Opinion: How Political Actors View the Democratic Process, Herbst

This study traces the effects of a purposefully chosen news agenda on the perceived and actual issue opinions of members of the mass public. Using a year-long, quasi-experimental design, we analyzed a newspaper's attempt to move community opinion and bring about policy change.

It all started in when his mother-in-law ran for public office in Iowa. She was running against a popular incumbent, and everyone except him thought her candidacy was a lost cause. He polled her constituency, told her she could win, and gave her some advice. Hers was only the first of many elections he was to predict correctly. His name was George Gallup – the founder of modern polling. Since then, polling organizations have proliferated, so that they now play a vital role in American politics. They are able to measure public opinion so accurately because they have carefully developed some very precise methods. For all the attention paid to them, public opinion polls often miss the mark. The most famous example was the presidential election, when pollsters predicted a landslide victory for Thomas E. Dewey. Instead, Harry Truman defeated Dewey by more than two million popular and electoral votes. Polls generally start when someone wants a political question answered. For example, a candidate may wonder, "How many people in my district know who I am and what I do? Or a newspaper may want to know, "How do people in this country feel about big tobacco companies? The pollsters then follow several important steps in gathering accurate statistics: Questions must be carefully and objectively worded. For example, consider a question such as, "How much do you resent the deceptiveness of big tobacco companies? Sometimes the slightest shift in the wording of a question can bring very different results. The sample must be randomly selected. First, pollsters determine the universe, or the entire group whose attitudes they wish to measure. Since it is generally impossible to question everyone, they must use random sampling, a method of selection that gives each potential member of the universe the same chance of being selected. Respondents must be contacted in a cost efficient way. However, accuracy cannot be sacrificed to efficiency. For example, a straw poll that asks television viewers to call in their opinions is generally not very accurate. After all, the people that call in usually feel very strongly about the issue. And some of them call in more than once. Telephone polls are probably used most commonly today, partly because of the capability of random-digit dialing. Bill Clinton was criticized for paying too much attention to the polls. Gary Trudeau used an icon of a "waffle" to represent President Clinton in his political cartoon, "Doonesbury. These calls were later reversed. Should the media be allowed to declare the winner of a state before all the votes are tallied? Should politicians monitor the polls? Candidates have been criticized for "waffling" – shifting their positions based on the results of public opinion polls. Americans have different opinions about whether a leader is expected to use his or her own judgment or reflect the viewpoints of his or her constituency. Poll results must be carefully and accurately compiled and reported. This is not always an easy task, especially for tracking polls that are measuring changing public opinion. A good example is an election poll. Statistics that are a week old are not usually very reliable when trying to predict a close presidential race. Polls can never be completely accurate because a sample cannot replicate the universe exactly. Pollsters allow for this slight chance of inaccuracy with a margin of error. Standard samples of about 1,000 individuals can usually represent a universe of millions of people with only a small amount of error. You can see how predicting a close election can be very difficult. Given the challenges of accurate polling of public opinion, it is amazing that polls that follow the right steps almost always make the right predictions. The Gallup Organization Drop by this site to have a look at what a random sampling of a few hundred Americans think about all sorts of issues. The Gallup Organization provides public opinion data of all kinds, including polls on business and social topics, in addition to its political polls. You may also want to check out their "How Gallup Polls Are Conducted" page to see exactly how their information is gathered. Zogby International Like the folks at the Gallup Organization, Zogby International provides heaps and heaps of public opinion data in the form of polls. Visit their homepage for up-to-the-minute information, and explore their site for an archive of where Zogby polls have popped up in the news, a chance to view a sample of their newsletter, and more.

Designing Surveys and Questionnaires The design at this page is nothing to shout about, but there is some

very good info here if you look! Scroll down for a table full of links to short explanations of many of the terms used in the public opinion business, as well as some links to tips on how to design a comprehensive, well-balanced survey. Visit their "studies" page for a long list of the projects taken on by this organization and the methods used. The Campaign While public opinion polls can sometimes be helpful, it is best to take them with a grain of salt. This was the lesson learned from the presidential election, which pitted Republican Thomas E. Dewey and a few third-party candidates against Harry Truman. While the polls showed a landslide was on the way for Dewey, Truman came out the winner. This incredible resource, chock full of photos, speeches, and articles from the campaign, comes to you from Project Whistlestop. Recent articles address topics such as "Political Talk Radio and Public Opinion," and trends in the polls. Be sure to bring some salt, though â€” the writing could use a little flavoring.

Chapter 6 : Public Opinion Polls - Constitutional Rights Foundation

Public opinion is one of the most frequently evoked terms in American politics. At the most basic level, public opinion represents people's collective preferences on matters related to government and politics.

What people believe; How they feel about something; or In what way they will act. The results from public opinion polls are used in a number of ways. They have come to influence what Americans are offered to eat and drink, the kinds of cars they can buy, and the programs that they can watch on TV. In addition, public opinion polls now play an important role in politics. They are used throughout the course of election campaigns by candidates and by the media to see which candidates are ahead and who is likely to emerge victorious. But can the polls really be trusted? In the Presidential election, for example, the polls predicted certain victory for Republican Thomas E. Without waiting for the official count of the votes, newspapers throughout the country proclaimed in their headlines, "Dewey Defeats Truman. Public opinion analysts and professional polling organizations, however, did profit from this colossal mis-prediction. With their credibility severely damaged, they developed far more sophisticated sampling techniques. Moreover, they made greater use of sociological and psychological research and modern computer technology. In addition, they are careful to point out that their findings apply only at the time the questions were asked and that the results do not predict the outcome of the election. Nevertheless, in viewing the results of any public opinion poll, it might be useful to ask the following questions: Generally speaking, the accuracy of a poll depends upon the degree to which the characteristics of the people being interviewed is really similar to those of the group they are supposed to represent. For example, the polling of sixteen-year-olds to predict the outcome of an election would be very questionable since they cannot vote. Also, as a general rule, the greater the number of people interviewed, the more likely the prediction will be accurate. Everything else being equal, an election poll of , out of two million voters is more likely to produce accurate results than a poll of 1, out of the same number. It is important to point out that large, national polling organizations have small national samples of under 2, that predict quite accurately for the entire electorate. Lastly, those interviewed should have been selected in a random fashion. This is usually done to avoid or lessen the possibility of allowing any "unaccounted for" bias or characteristics Generally speaking, unclear, biased, or emotionally charged questions will produce misleading answers and weaken the accuracy of the results of a poll. How do you feel about candidate X? Also, if the people being polled are asked to choose from a given set of responses in answering a question, there must be an acceptable number of alternatives from which to choose. For example, suppose those being polled are required to respond to a question Finally, polls conducted by telephone or through the mails generally do not tend to be as reliable as personal interviews. This is largely due to the fact that the former measures are not as likely to be able to control for who really participates in the poll, the number who respond, and possible misinterpretation of the questions. When Was the Poll Conducted? It should also be noted that the results of a poll are representative As a general rule, the more current the poll, the more likely it is to produce meaningful and useful results. A summer poll regarding who should be elected president in , for example, is not likely to be as accurate as a poll taken during election week of the actual election. Who Conducted the Poll? Past reputation and performance can also help an individual determine the validity of the results of a poll. In addition, polls conducted by groups with an obvious interest in the results should be held suspect until proven otherwise. What was the Percentage of Error Polling organizations should also indicate what the potential for error of their poll is. Based on the size of their sample it is statistically possible to do sod indicates reliability to the reader. Based on this analysis, consider the following questions: Which of the factors described above in assessing the validity of a poll do you think is most important? Do you think polls are valuable? Why or why not? Would you place any restriction on them in reporting an election? It can help you learn what people in your school or community think about the election and other issues. There are three steps to conducting a public opinion poll: This will make your public opinion poll easy to tabulate. Keep the public opinion poll short and simple. Be sure that your questions do not force particular answers. They must be unbiased. Otherwise your public opinion poll results will be open to criticism. Test your public opinion

poll. Before conducting the public opinion poll, ask someone to check it over. Does that person think it is clear? Select the Population and Sample Determine the population. What will your poll results represent? The opinions of everyone in the community? Of a section of the community? Select the population you want the poll to cover. Try to get a random sample of the population. This means that every person in the population has the same chance of taking the public opinion poll. For example, telephoning the fifth person on each page of the phone book would be a random sample. Conduct the Public opinion poll Prepare and practice a brief introduction. People who answer your public opinion poll are doing you a favor. Tell all interviewees that they do not have to put their names on the public opinion poll. Results will be reported anonymously. Be as organized as possible. Use a clipboard to hold the public opinion polls and bring extra pens or pencils. Wait for each public opinion poll and check it. Make sure the information is complete. If you read the public opinion poll to the respondent and fill it in, write exactly what the person says.

Chapter 7 : Shaping Public Opinion | Facing History and Ourselves

In contrast to much of the experimentally based literature on political cognition which fails to take account of culture, language, and experience, Reading Public Opinion employs a rhetorical psychological approach and depth interviews which clearly demonstrate the pragmatic ways political actors evaluate public opinion.

Additional Information In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: Book Reviews Reading Public Opinion: University of Chicago Press, ; pp. Following her much acclaimed book, Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling has Shaped American Politics, Susan Herbst seeks to broaden our conceptions of public opinion and its role in democratic governance. Through depth interviews and surveys, she analyzes the "lay theories" of the politically active and reveals how polled opinions play only a minor role in democratic policy making. Herbst draws from a wide range of past scholarship, including early studies of public opinion and group formation, postmodern theories, cultural studies, political science, and communications in order to lay the foundation for her argument that public opinion is socially constructed and affected by institutions, technology, and political culture. In contrast to much of the experimentally based literature on political cognition which fails to take account of culture, language, and experience, Reading Public Opinion employs a rhetorical psychological approach and depth interviews which clearly demonstrate the pragmatic ways political actors evaluate public opinion. She conducted depth interviews with 44 working political professionals and party activists: These rich qualitative data were supplemented with a survey of convention delegates from across the United States. Using interpretive methods for querying her informants and analyzing their discourse , Herbst convincingly demonstrates the sharply contrasting views of public opinion held by these three differently situated groups of participants in the policymaking process. For the staff members interviewed in this study, two indicators of public opinion were particularly relevant: The journalists, on the other hand, talked about public opinion in terms of interpersonal dialogue and conversations with citizens. The party activists relied on yet another conception of public opinion and were more comfortable with public opinions expressed through polls and through conversations with friends and acquaintances. Her informants view public opinion in very pragmatic, instrumental terms that are shaped by their professional roles. For example, staffers discuss public opinion in terms of "which segments of the public will react to a legislative maneuver and how such reactions will become manifest" Public opinion , as measured by polls, is not particularly useful. Moreover, polls capture only a fleeting snapshot of the public mood and fail to communicate the intensity, directional dynamic, and organization of opinion which are necessary to formulate politically successful policy. Interest groups and journalists are far better situated to articulate public sentiments for staff members because they are informed, accessible, and perceived as able to persuade an otherwise amorphous and indifferent public. Interestingly, staff members rely on interest groups and media to convey public opinion despite their acknowledged biases. The political roles of journalists and party activists are quite different from those of legislative staff members, as are their conceptions of public opinion. Party activists see public opinion as aggregations of individual opinions either through conversations or polling. You are not currently authenticated. View freely available titles:

Chapter 8 : A Review of Lippmann's "Public Opinion" â€” FromTheLabBench

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