

Manipulating Public Opinion

Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable



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Gary A. Mauser

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We dedicate this book to our children:
Mathieu, Kendrick, Kele, and Jesse;
Karen, Jenny, Abby, Max, and Nicky

PREFACE

This book grew out of our discussions at a panel on public opinion methodology at the 1985 meeting of the American Political Science Association in New Orleans. Our discussions became so animated that we adjourned to Delmonico's, where we began studying French wines, and continued talking late into the night. We found that both of us were disappointed by the current state of research on public opinion and democratic government. The focus of research in public opinion was far too limited by the over-reliance upon "representative" survey methods. Researchers, however sophisticated their methodology, were letting their tools determine the problems they studied. We felt that all too often they failed to study the most important questions. Too many researchers presumed that opinions given in response to survey questions determine—or at least set strict limits for—public policies. Few were attempting to trace the origins of those opinions.

We thought that the prevailing research orientation generally gave short shrift to the problem of managing or manipulating public opinion, and tended to place the burden of responsibility for unpopular policies upon the mass public, not upon political decision-makers or other elites who, arguably, are more powerful. We decided to write a book predicated upon the notion that public opinion could be viewed more fruitfully as a dependent variable. *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable* is the result. There is no other book like it; it defines its own niche.

In this book we demonstrate that any analyst who seeks to account for public policy decisions is well advised to begin by examining the preferences of elites rather than the "state of public opinion" as measured by survey studies. *Manipulating Public Opinion* covers three types of problem areas: (1) short-term studies of opinion formation during election campaigns; (2) short-to-medium-term studies of the development of selected public policies; and (3) medium-to-long-term studies of the process

of political socialization. This book can be used as a main text or supplement in undergraduate courses in political science or communications. It includes empirical studies of hypotheses about the abilities of political elites to manage public opinion in each of the three topic areas. It is of particular relevance to courses on the role of the mass media in modern democracies, such as public opinion, campaigns and elections, political communications, mass media, journalism and politics, public policy, political sociology, and political marketing.

While American politics provides the impetus for this book, several chapters touch on politics in countries as various as Canada, France, and Ethiopia. Our contributors include academics and practitioners from Canada as well as the United States, who specialize in political science, communications, economics, marketing, and rhetoric. We are confident that *Manipulating Public Opinion* will have a strong cross-disciplinary appeal.

General readers should also find this book of interest. We have tried not to use the turgid prose that permeates too many professional books, and we worked with our contributors to develop a coherent style without sacrificing academic rigor. We provide introductory and concluding chapters that state succinctly our view that public opinion acts more as a dependent than as an independent variable. Every chapter is conceptually tied to the central theme of the book, and we provide brief introductions to each chapter, showing how the author develops aspects of our theme. As an aid to the serious researcher, we have included a names index, a subject index, and a bibliography.

As originally conceived, this book demanded a greater span of knowledge and effort than we possessed between us. To help us flesh it out, we enlisted some of our colleagues who were actively conducting important research in related areas. In June 1986 we began to commission the original essays for this book. We sought out colleagues who could write essays with two complementary goals: to summarize the major findings in public opinion and to break new ground. This project has gradually taken shape over the past few years. Interim reports were delivered at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association (1986); the Northeast Political Science Association (1986); and the Midwest Political Science Association (1987).

Acknowledgments

No book springs full-blown like Minerva from the brow of its creator, and *Manipulating Public Opinion* is no exception to this rule. We have benefited from the gracious assistance of many people, among them our colleagues who generously read and criticized early drafts of our manuscript. In particular, we thank Mark Wexler and John Richards, Simon Fraser University; and Bert Rockman and Fred Whelan, University of

Pittsburgh. We also thank the readers who evaluated the first submission of the book and who now are willing to break their cover of anonymity: Allan J. Cigler, University of Kansas, and Gregory B. Markus, University of Michigan. They provided valuable criticism and suggestions that, despite our initial protestations to the contrary, greatly improved the final version.

We also acknowledge our respective universities, not only for the secretarial and scholarly support, but for the use of their computer centers' international communication networks. Without Bitnet, Netnorth, and Autonet we could never have maintained the almost daily contact over "e-mail" that was necessary to complete this project. Special thanks to the Department of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh, and to the Faculty of Business Administration at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. Gary Mauser also thanks Stanley Shapiro, Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration, and other members of his faculty for being so supportive of his work on this book, despite their wondering perhaps just what such a project had to do with marketing. Finally, we owe thanks to our secretaries and manuscript typists, who provided advice about word processing systems, modems, and telecommunications protocol as well: Anita Mahony and Betty Chung at Simon Fraser University; and Donna Myers, Michelle Pupich, and Josie Raleigh at the University of Pittsburgh.

Leo Wiegman, formerly political science editor at the Dorsey Press (now at Peacock Publishers), deserves special recognition for negotiating and coordinating the complex contractual arrangements, and Penelope Sky deserves a rose for pushing the book through production on schedule after Brooks/Cole inherited the project.

Finally, we express our gratitude for the loving support our families have shown us throughout the many months we have worked on this book. Ede particularly, and our children, have made numerous sacrifices, giving up plans for family outings, dinners, and even romantic evenings alone, in order to allow us to work on what must have seemed like an unending project. We hope that they, and you, will find the result worthwhile.

Michael Margolis
Gary A. Mauser

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