



Public Opinion

Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice

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In 1975 Poynter founded the Modern Media Institute, renamed The Poynter Institute for Media Studies after his death. The Poynter Institute (www.poynter.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to training journalists and media leaders. It advocates excellence and integrity in the practice of a journalism that informs citizens and enlightens the public discourse.

Public Opinion

To my parents, Dale and Janice Clawson, who taught me that people matter.

To my mother, Rachel Oxley, whose encouragement and optimism never wavered, and to my entire family for supporting my endeavors.

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Preface

At the 1999 Southern Political Science Association meeting in Savannah, Georgia, James Headley, then the national sales manager at CQ Press, approached Rosie Clawson and asked if she would be interested in writing a public opinion text with Zoe Oxley. A few weeks later, he e-mailed Zoe to see if she wanted to coauthor this text with Rosie. Rosie and Zoe jumped at the opportunity to work together on this project and were especially excited to work with the wonderful people at CQ Press. Since neither had tenure at the time, it took a while to move the project beyond the planning stages. Now, more than eight years, two tenures, and two babies later, we finally have completed our book!

While we never anticipated that writing this text would take so many years, our goals for the book remained the same throughout the process. We want students to grasp how fascinating and important it is to study politics generally and public opinion more specifically. What better way to attain that goal, we think, than to discuss public opinion in the context of democratic thought. After all, it is the particular salience of public opinion within a democracy that makes its study so vital and interesting. To that end, we situate the field's empirical research within a normative framework, specifically theories of democracy, and focus on especially important and revealing studies rather than tediously summarizing every available piece of research. We organize the text into six sections, each of which poses a normative question that is significant for democratic theory, such as: What should be the relationship between citizens and their government? What should be the role of citizens in a democracy? Are citizens' opinions pliable? Do citizens organize their political thinking? Do they demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to the democratic "basics"? That is, are they knowledgeable? Interested? Attentive? Do they support civil rights and civil liberties? The chapters in each section present evidence to help students answer the question at hand, giving them both the content and context of public opinion. This organization encourages students to understand and interpret the empirical evidence in light of normative democratic theories, thus enhancing their critical analysis skills.

We want students to appreciate the thrill of conducting research and producing knowledge and to learn that conclusions about public opinion emerge from original scholarship on the topic. Yet we also want them to understand that no one piece of research is perfect and that the ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of research is a vital skill. So we devote attention to explaining specific studies in some depth throughout the text. Rather than presenting only the conclusions that are drawn from a study, this approach lets students see how those conclusions were reached, exposes them in a fairly organic way to the range of research methods used in the study of public opinion, and illustrates how the choice of method influences the conclusions that researchers draw. We thus use an “embedded” research method approach throughout the book rather than consign methods to one stand-alone chapter. Additionally, we provide an appendix that encapsulates the basic information students need on key public opinion methods.

This text includes other important pedagogical features. We focus heavily on American public opinion, but chapters 2 through 11 contain feature boxes called “Public Opinion in Comparative Perspective” that highlight public opinion issues in a variety of countries and serve to deepen students’ understandings of American public opinion. A wealth of data is presented in more than eighty tables and figures throughout the book to help students grasp important research findings. Core concepts are bolded in each chapter and included in a list of key concepts at the end of each chapter. The key concepts are also defined in a glossary at the end of the book. Each chapter contains a list of suggested sources for further reading. Brief explanatory annotations are provided with each suggested source to guide students as they delve deeper into a topic.

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Completing this book required the assistance of many people. A long-standing debt of gratitude is owed to our graduate school advisers, Paul Allen Beck, Thomas Nelson, and Katherine Tate. They opened our eyes and minds to the study of public opinion and trained us to be political scientists. From the day Tom arrived at Ohio State, he involved us in every stage of his research and taught us how to produce rigorous scholarship. Tom also demonstrated the importance of engaging writing, a skill we have both worked hard to hone. As for Paul, we most appreciate his generosity of time. No matter how busy he is (and as department chair and now university dean, he is busier than most), he always responds to any query we have, whether for feedback on our scholarship or professional advice. We also greatly appreciate and admire Katherine Tate. Of the many valuable lessons we learned from Katherine, one was to stay attuned to and ground our scholarship in the real world of politics. We kept that advice in mind as we wrote this text.

We were also extremely fortunate to have wonderful undergraduate mentors. While attending Bowdoin College, Zoe’s honors thesis adviser was Janet Martin.

Janet was the first person to suggest to Zoe that she consider graduate school in political science (and told her how to apply for PhD funding!). Since then, Janet has been very supportive of Zoe's career and continues to provide useful guidance. Bruce Stinebrickner was Rosie's favorite political science professor at DePauw University. Their shared interests in politics and women's basketball have turned them into close friends over the years. Rosie thanks Bruce for all his advice, enthusiasm, and good cheer.

We are so grateful to the many people who provided valuable and specific feedback on this text. Our prospectus and chapter outlines were improved by suggestions from Jeremy Zilber, Keith Shimko, Suzanne Parker, Richard Fox, and George Bizer. For reading completed chapters, or portions thereof, we thank Cary Funk, Ewa Golebiowska, Jennifer Jerit, and John Zumbrunnen. Janice Clawson read many of our chapters, and we are very appreciative of the time she devoted to this. Some of our students also read individual or multiple chapters, including Evan Reid, students in Rosie's Human Basis of Politics course, and students in Zoe's Political Psychology course. For reading many chapters thoughtfully and carefully, we especially thank Ben Bauer and Mike Grady. The quality of the material in this text is due in no small part to those who read early versions of our chapters.

We would also like to thank the professors CQ Press commissioned to review the manuscript at various stages, including Scott Basinger, Stony Brook University; John Bruce, University of Mississippi; Ted Jelen, University of Nevada–Las Vegas; Mary Fran T. Malone, University of New Hampshire; Tom Nelson, Ohio State University; Shayla Nunnally, University of Connecticut; Robert Y. Shapiro, Columbia University; and Matt Wilson, Southern Methodist University. Their guidance was invaluable as we drafted and revised the manuscript.

We received support in other important ways as well. Larry Baum and John Clark gave us loads of good advice along the way. We thank them for their words of wisdom. For helping us with *Chicago*-style documentation, we thank Mary Cahill (who gave us her copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style*) and Carol Cichy (who converted early chapters that were formatted using APSA style). The Dean of Arts and Sciences at Union College funded essential travel so that we could be together to work on the book during the early days. Richard Fox allowed Zoe to arrange her teaching schedule to free up time to write, which was most welcome. Lisa Howell and Evan Reid hunted down articles and wrote helpful summaries. Helen Willis spent part of her middle-school summer vacation searching for material to be included in the text. Zoe thanks Helen for her careful work and predicts for her a bright future in politics or political science. Andrea Olive and Bill Shaffer offered Rosie words of encouragement at key times. Michelle Conwell assisted Rosie with pop culture references and various computer issues; her sassiness and irreverence were also invaluable. We must also mention our many Ohio State friends, who supported and encouraged us throughout the book-writing process. We greatly appreciate them.

Early on, we were told that CQ Press is a wonderful press to publish a first book. We were happy to hear that then, and even happier that our experience confirmed this. Everyone we worked with at CQ was supportive, professional, and friendly. James Headley not only encouraged us to consider writing the text but also helped us understand the book publishing process. When we told him that we would have to wait a couple years before starting the project, he demonstrated enough faith in our ability to write this text to wait until the time was right for us. College director Brenda Carter also displayed early interest in our project. We are especially grateful for their patience. Substantial patience was also displayed by chief acquisitions editor Charisse Kiino. As various professional and personal engagements slowed down our early work on the book, Charisse did not falter in her enthusiasm for this text and optimism that we would finish it. Furthermore, during points when our writing progress was stuck, Charisse's advice helped motivate us and pushed the project along. Development editor Elise Frasier skillfully and efficiently shepherded the text through the final development stages, always with good cheer. For responding to our many, many questions clearly, we also thank Elise. She made straightforward what could have been a confusing and anxiety-inducing process. Elaine Dunn's diligent copyediting improved our prose, and the speed of her editing allowed the book to proceed on schedule despite our lateness in getting material written. Steve Pazdan, managing editor, and Talia Greenberg, project editor, were also very efficient, including responding to e-mails on weeknights and weekends.

While it does not quite take a village to raise our children, with working spouses, we have needed help from many to care for our sons. Knowing that they were in the hands of loving and responsible caregivers enabled us to write without worry. For this, Zoe thanks Joyce von Elburg, Anna Ott, Becky Broadwin, Rachel Bennett, Amanda Roosevelt, Kelly Lannan, Caitlin Milbury, Katie Monroe, and her parents-in-law, Millie and Wilbur Miller. Rosie thanks Kara Wuethrich, Helen Bartlett, the wonderful daycare staff at the YWCA, and especially her mom, Janice Clawson.

Finally, we owe special thanks to our families. We were both raised by parents who placed priority on education and who encouraged us to pursue whatever channels most interested us. Their faith that we would succeed in our chosen career paths provided us with the confidence to try to do just that. Sadly, Zoe's mother passed away before this book was completed. She was very pleased to learn that we were writing a text, and we know that she would be proud to see the completed version. When Rosie's husband was deployed (over and over again), support came from family near and far. Rosie thanks Dale and Janice Clawson; Tammy, Mike, and Jared Harter; Jill, Scott, Liv, and Sadie Castleman; and her Cleveland cousins.

Our sons Alonzo and Owen bring us tremendous joy. And as they both enter toddlerhood, we expect to have many opportunities to practice our skills at

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