

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
RIVERSIDE

Distant Voices: Citizen Judgments About Polling Methods and Collective Public
Opinion

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Mary G. Currin-Percival

September 2006

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Martin Johnson, Chairperson

Dr. Shaun Bowler

Dr. Kevin Esterling

UMI Number: 3244076

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3244076

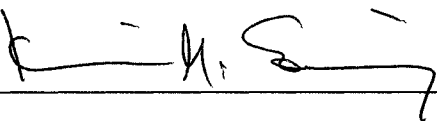
Copyright 2007 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

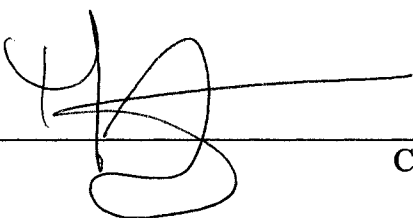
ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright by
Mary G. Currin-Percival
2006

The Dissertation of Mary G. Currin-Percival is approved:






_____ Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people I want to thank for all of their support, friendship, and love throughout these eventful years. First, I want to thank my husband Garrick Percival for his love, patience, and support. We have been through so much together and I know these challenges made us stronger people. We have studied and worked for hours over tumblers of coffee and we somehow made it through. Thank you for keeping me motivated through all of the chaos. I love you with all of my heart.

I also want to thank the other two loves of my life, my wonderful sons Andrew and Ethan. I hope that your being raised on college campus inspires you to dream big. I love you both so much and I will always be there for you. Andrew, you amaze all of us with your intelligence, but I still can't answer your questions about how wormholes develop. I hope that you become as interested in social science; but I know that no matter what science you pursue, you will achieve greatness. Ethan, you are a ray of sunshine to us all. Your smile lights up the room and you make us all feel so lucky to be your family. May you be inspired by your brother to search for answers to difficult questions (although you have to go to him for the answers to most of the hard science questions).

To my mom, Mary Wilkins, thank you for believing that I could achieve my dreams. To my dad, Bernard W. Currin, Jr., you inspired my love of science and of learning. I love you both. To Thornton and Elaine Percival, you have been a constant source of support and love. Thank you for all of the help and encouragement you have given me over these many years. I also want to thank my sister Claire Patten for her encouragement and love. You and I have been through so much; yet somehow, we were

able to pursue our dreams. I want to thank my best friend Jennifer Wood who has always been a sister to me. You are a great inspiration to me too. Without you, I don't think I would have been able to do this. Thank you for all of your love, support, and motivation. I also thank Najia Khogyani-Hashemee. We went through some crazy stuff in graduate school and that created a bond between us that can never be broken. I am eternally grateful for your friendship and I know that no matter what continent you, Ma'el and Terry are on, we will always remain only an email away.

Of all of the teachers I've had over these many years of school, one stands out as exceptional-my mentor, advisor, and friend Martin Johnson. You always inspired me to work hard and you have prepared me for my career more than anyone else has. For this, I can never thank you enough. I hope you know how much you have meant to us all and how much we have learned from you. Thank you for everything. And thank you and Sherri for being Ethan's Godparents.

I want to thank Shaun Bowler for all of his guidance and friendship. You always had time to help me. You also inspired me to try to answer the big question "Why should we care about this?" You also reminded me that this is just one part of my life. Your dedication to your family is inspirational to me. I also want to thank John Williams for all of the guidance and encouragement he gave to me. We still have the rug you gave us that "brought the room together." I will never forget how kind you were to Garrick, Andrew, "Ethan Allen," and me. Thank you for being our friend and mentor.

There are a number of people who have been so helpful to me over these years. I want to especially thank Max Neiman, Kevin Esterling, and Antoine Yoshinaka, and

Robert Hannemann for their help with this project. I also want to thank Ande Jones, Monique Davis-Brooks, Naja Braddock, Cherrie Veriato, Sarah Neiman, Richard Hofstetter, Bill Schultze, Charles Andrain, Julie Sullivan, Jon Hiskey, John Cioffi, Bronwyn Leebaw, David Pion-Berlin, Chris Larson, Karen Ball, Skip Lupia, Christina Lopez-Yip (Ethan's other Godmother), Bonnie Slike, Mary Caprioli, Laura Chapin, Runa Das, Maggie Steffensen-Ahmadi, Erin Moyer, Laurel Latto, Aline Messer, Le Dina Joy, Jennifer Van Heerde, Gary Goodman, Christina Caldwell, Jackie Filla, Shawn Schulenberg, Chris Metaxis, Marti Doyle, and everyone else who made my life much better.

Of course, any errors found within this dissertation are of my own doing.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to Garrick, Andrew, Ethan, and my mom with all of my love.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Distant Voices: Citizen Judgments About Polling Methods and Collective Public Opinion

by

Mary G. Currin-Percival

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science
University of California, Riverside, September 2006
Dr. Martin Johnson, Chairperson

This project offers a new understanding of how the media presents public opinion polling information to citizens and how they perceive this information. Media reports of poll results provide citizens with valuable information about popular sentiment towards political issues and candidates. However, after my content analysis of three well-known media outlets' reports about polls, I find evidence to support the claim that in reports about poll results, the media often offers poor interpretation and inadequate methodological information. I find that the *New York Times*, the *NBC Nightly News*, and CNN's *The Situation Room* do not comply well with the American Association of Public Opinion Research's minimum standards for disclosure about poll results. The information the media includes in reports about poll results likely affects citizens' perceptions of polls, especially of polling methodology. I use data from a 1998 Pew survey to analyze the relationship between media exposure and perceptions of scientific

polling methodology. I find that individuals who are very liberal and who read the newspaper are more likely to believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology. In addition, using data obtained from a 2001 survey sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, I find that several factors such as education, perceptions of scientific polling methodology, and partisanship affect citizens' impressions of various polls and polling organizations. I find that these impressions in turn affect whether citizens pay attention to polls or believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. Furthermore, I find that citizens' confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens, whose opinion is represented in poll results, is integral to their decisions to pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions and their beliefs that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the nation. These findings help us better understand the link between media reports about polling information and the public. They also help us better understand how polls fit into the American political experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Acknowledgments	iv
Dedication	vii
Dissertation Abstract	viii
Table of Contents	x
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xiii
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: Theory and Model	46
Chapter III: How Does the News Media Report Polling Information?	67
Chapter IV: Public Perceptions of the “Science” of Polls: Individual Characteristics That Affect Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology	92
Chapter V: Impressions of Polls: How Do Citizens Perceive Particular Polls and Polling Organizations?	109
Chapter VI: Confidence in the Collective's Political Judgments and Attention to Polls	134
Chapter VII: Conclusion	168
References	184
Appendix	195

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page Number
3.1	Conformity to AAPOR Standards by the <i>New York Times</i> and NBC Nightly News	81
3.2	Conformity to AAPOR Standards by the <i>New York Times</i> and NBC Nightly News, (excluding stories with passing references to polls)	84
3.3	Conformity to AAPOR Standards by CNN's <i>The Situation Room</i>	86
3.4	Conformity to AAPOR Standards by CNN's <i>The Situation Room</i> , (excluding stories with passing references to polls)	87
4.1	Individual Characteristics that Affect Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology	102
4.2	Significance of R^2 in Auxiliary Regressions	105
5.1	Frequency Distribution of Favorability Ratings of Polls	116
5.2	Impressions of Media Polls	120
5.3	Impressions of Academic Research Centers' Polls	121
5.4	Impressions of Nonprofit Organizations' or Foundations' Polls	121
5.5	Impressions of Polling Organizations Such as Gallup or Harris	122
5.6	Impressions of Polls Commissioned by Political Parties	122
5.7	Impressions of Media Polls-Ideology Omitted and Republican Included	124
5.8	Impressions of Polls Commissioned by Political Parties-Ideology Omitted and Republican Included	125

Table	Page Number
6.1 Attention to Public Opinion Polls	142
6.2 Can the Public Make Sound Judgments About the Details of Laws and Regulations Debated in Congress?	144
6.3 Who Pays Attention to Polls?	146
6.4 Impressions of Different Polls and Polling Organizations and Attention to Polls	149
6.5 Individuals Items in Belief that Government Should Pay Attention to Polls Scale	154
6.6 Who Believes That Government Should Pay Attention to Polls?	155
6.7 Impressions of Different Polling Organizations and Belief that Government Should Pay Attention to Polls	159

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page Number
2.1 Citizen Perception and Incorporation of Polling Information	48
2.2 Citizens' Evaluations of Scientific Polling Methodology	52
2.3 What Affects Citizens' Impressions of Polls and Polling Organizations?	53
2.4 Factors Influencing Individual Attention to Polls	59
2.5 Factors Influencing Citizens' Beliefs that Political Leaders Should Pay Attention to Public Opinion Polls	63
4.1 Citizens' Evaluations of Scientific Polling Methodology	93
4.2 Ideology, Newspaper Use, and Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology	103
5.1 What Affects Citizens' Impressions of Polls and Polling Organizations?	110
6.1 Factors Influencing Individual Attention to Polls	138
6.2 Factors Influencing Citizens' Beliefs that Government Should Pay Attention to Public Opinion Polls	151

Chapter I

Introduction

After watching any television news broadcast or reading any newspaper, one might conclude that public opinion polls have become as much a part of the American political process as elections or other political participation efforts. These polls are ubiquitous in the media and constitute a growing amount of the information citizens receive from the media. In a given day, a typical consumer might see poll results or be asked to participate in a poll in their daily newspaper, the local and national television news, and on Internet news websites. The seemingly endless reporting of poll results in the media offers information to citizens. Citizens evaluate this polling information and then some even incorporate it into their political thinking. Media reports about polls are not innocuous bits of information provided to and consumed by citizens but are in fact an important part of the American political experience. In this project, my goal is to answer several research questions about how citizens evaluate and use polling information.

First, how are polls presented in the media? Specifically, what methodological information is included in reports about polls? Are there differences in the type and amount of information offered to consumers of television news and newspaper readers? Second, how do citizens perceive polls in general? What affects their perceptions of polling information such as polling methodology? Do Republican and Democrats perceive polls differently for instance? Next, which citizens pay attention to polls when thinking about political issues or political candidates? How do citizens' perceptions of the political judgments of their fellow citizens, whose opinion is represented in poll

results, affect their decision to pay attention to polling information when making their own political decisions? Similarly, which citizens believe that government should pay attention to polls in the governing process? For instance, are partisans more likely to believe that government should pay attention to polling information when making political decisions for the nation? How does an individual's perception of the credibility of the judgments of his or her fellow Americans affect his or her belief that government should use polling information?

In this chapter, I explain why we should further examine how people perceive and use polls. I also discuss how public opinion polls are important to American democracy. Specifically, I focus on how polls might connect citizens to their representatives. I also discuss why citizens might not pay attention to polling information in the media. In addition, I look at what factors might affect citizens' perceptions of the credibility of polling information and how this affects their belief that polling information serves as a useful tool for them and for their leaders to use when making political decisions. In chapter two, I offer my model of how people perceive polls and what factors, such as their political party identification, perception of the political judgments of their fellow citizens, and education, affect whether they pay attention to polls in their own political thinking. I also theorize about the relationship between these same factors and whether people believe that government should use polls when making political decisions for the nation. In chapters three through six, I test several hypotheses about how the media presents polls as well as how people perceive and use polls and discuss the results of this hypothesis testing. Finally, in chapter seven, I conclude with a general discussion of my

findings and I offer my suggestions for future research in this area of public opinion and political behavior.

This project is important for several reasons. First, it offers us an additional explanation for why people choose to use some political information to which they are exposed and reject other information. We already know that people do not use all of the political information they are exposed to in the media, from government, and in their everyday lives. There are a number of reasons why this is the case which I touch on briefly later in this chapter. But one reasonable explanation for why people do not use all of this information is that they do not find it credible. I offer a specific view of what affects an individual's perception that polling information is credible and how this perception of credibility in turn affects whether he or she uses this polling information when forming political judgments.

As social scientists, we are interested in what factors affect an individual's thought process. As political scientists, we are especially interested in what factors affect an individual's thought process regarding politics and public policy. Moreover, we are especially interested in what information is more likely to persuade people to make these political decisions. For instance, does information presented in the media persuade some and not others? More specifically, who might be persuaded by representations of collective opinion reported in the media? Further, is this persuasion ultimately dependent upon whether citizens find the opinions of their fellow citizens credible?

Importantly, this project offers us a greater understanding of how citizens perceive the opinions represented in polling information. If four out of five dentists agree

for instance, and you do not trust dentists, are you likely to use their recommended toothpaste? While this example is rather simplistic, I propose that it is a realistic depiction of how people use polling information. Consider for example the information provided in the media. As shown from the studies on the hostile media effect and partisan press inference, partisans might reject information in the media because of their perception that it is biased and therefore not credible. I also look at how partisans perceive polling information presented in the media to determine if they are more likely to reject this information as biased. Moreover, I look at how partisanship and other factors affect citizens' perceptions of the opinions in polling information obtained from surveys with their fellow citizens.

Therefore, this study helps us to better understand how an individual's perception of the credibility of information affects how he or she uses it. We should specifically gain a better understanding of whether citizens learn from their fellow citizens. In addition, we should gain insight into whether individuals find their fellow citizens credible sources of information about politics and government in particular. Does whether an individual pays attention to polling information depend in part upon his or her perception that the opinions represented in the polling information constitute credible information? It is not rational for citizens to base their political judgments upon information they perceive as not credible. Therefore, we should determine first whether citizens find the collective judgments of their fellow citizens credible and then determine how this affects whether they incorporate polling information into their political decision-

making or their belief that their government leaders should pay attention to this polling information when making decisions for the nation.

This idea of whether citizens believe that government should pay attention to polls is important on its own as well. In addition to helping us to better understand how people perceive and use political information, this study offers us an enhanced view of how citizens believe government should respond to the opinions of their constituents. In other words, how do public opinion polls fit within a theory of representation? This project will help us better understand what affects citizens' perceptions of representation. I am interested specifically in understanding what factors affect a citizen's belief that his or her representative should follow more of a delegate model of representation by paying attention to polls when making political decisions for the country. Therefore, this study offers us the opportunity to examine how polls fit within American democracy. In the section that follows, I elaborate upon why this project matters, specifically, why more research into how people perceive and use polls is needed and how this project adds to previous work in this area. I then briefly review the previous literature on public opinion and public opinion polling. I conclude this chapter with a brief assessment of modern public opinion polling.

Why is this project important?

Public opinion polls fit within American democracy in that they offer one mode of connecting the people to their elected representatives. This connection between the people and their government is at the core of the American democratic experience. One of the fundamental tenets of American democracy is the idea of popular sovereignty. The

Framers of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were very much inspired by John Locke (1632-1704), who argued that citizens delegated power and authority to their government and thus had the right to annul this authorization (Kernell and Jacobson, 2006: 50). In addition, when writing the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson also looked at the writings by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who believed that kings not only ruled by divine right, but also by the consent of the governed (Fiorina, et al., 2006). While Hobbes believed that the people consent to an all-powerful king to govern them, his influence as well as Locke's can be seen in Jefferson's work.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem the most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness (Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*, 1776).

Therefore, from its conception, American democracy has relied on the concept that the government derives its powers from the people and that the people can alter the government if it strays too far from the political needs and desires of the citizenry. Given that the United States has a population of over 300 million, it would be extraordinarily difficult for our government leaders to gauge the needs and desires of every citizen. Therefore, the Framers of the Constitution devised one way for government to learn the needs of the citizenry-through elections. Presumably, candidates for political office listen to constituents, propose their public policy remedies for the ills of society, and then the

citizenry votes between the competing candidates. However, given that the turnout rate is so low in U.S. elections, we can hardly call elections mandates from the citizens.

Furthermore, elections in the U.S. are regular, but not frequent in the sense that citizens cannot immediately reward or punish their representatives for public policy decisions. Congressional elections every two years make it more difficult for citizens to voice their concerns to their representatives. But there are so many other ways that elected representatives can learn about the needs of their constituents. Citizens can call, write, and email their member of Congress. They can write letters to newspapers and other media outlets. Citizens can also sign petitions and engage in political protests in an effort to inform their leaders about specific policy concerns. Public opinion polls also provide information about constituents to elected officials. "Polls present an opportunity for citizens to express their opinions and preferences on these matters when the ballot box is not available to them" (Traugott, 2004: 78).

Traugott (2004: 79) points out that the government routinely consults the public about the "important issues of the day."

Federal agencies require impact assessments of major projects they have authorized, often conducted through polls and surveys. Legislators assess the potential consequences of likely legislation or policy changes through surveys of constituents or through the representation of public opinion in the form of the testimony of others presented before committee hearings (Traugott, 2004: 79).

Thus public opinion polls can be seen as additional tools to gauge the needs of the citizenry. Citizens can voice their concerns and their policy preferences to their leaders by registering their opinions in the different types of polls taken by political leaders, polling organizations, the media, academic institutions, and other organizations. They

participate in telephone polls as well as those conducted in person, by mail, and over the Internet. There are numerous opportunities to participate in polls in America. However, as I discuss later in this chapter, there are several concerns that Traugott and others have about using polls as a means to measure the preferences of the citizenry. First however, I address why citizens might want their leaders to pay attention to polls.

We might assume that some citizens expect their government to pay attention to polls, if this polling information signals the needs of the citizenry. This assumption rests on the belief that some citizens desire their representatives to adhere to the delegate model of representation. Numerous scholars have debated the two models of representation initially discussed by philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797). These two models, the trustee model and the delegate model, offer different concepts of the role of a representative. Burke preferred the trustee model, where a representative would serve the interests of his constituency, not its will (Miller and Stokes, 1963: 45). Krouse (1982: 511) explains that in the trustee concept of representation, “the representative must act upon his or her own independent judgment of the public good irrespective of the expressed will of the constituents.”

The delegate model offers a different concept of representation in that it puts a greater emphasis on the expressed preferences of the constituents. “The delegate theory of representation, in short, posits that the representative ought to reflect purposively the preferences of his constituents” (McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979: 278). Moreover, “[d]elegates believe that they are in office to follow the unfiltered opinion of the people.

A pure delegate does not express his or her personal opinion on an issue, but rather votes based on the opinions of the constituents” (Cooper and Richardson, 2006: 175).

Empirical support for the delegate model is mixed however. For instance, Miller and Stokes (1963) found that constituency opinion was not well reflected in roll call voting in Congress. However, Kuklinski and Elling (1977), in their analysis of the voting behavior of California assemblymen, showed that issue salience was an important variable. On salient issues, delegates were more likely than trustees or politicians (a combination of delegate and trustee) to represent constituency opinion. Further, McCrone and Kuklinski (1979) found that the delegate theory of representation is supported when two conditions are fulfilled simultaneously. “First, legislators must think of themselves as delegates. Second, constituents must provide consistent cues regarding district preferences to their representatives (McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979: 178).

Most research has shown that legislators see themselves more as trustees than as delegates though (Cooper and Richardson, 2006; Rosenthal 1998; Wahlke, 1962). Importantly, Cooper and Richardson (2006: 174) find that “legislative institutions can influence the representation roles legislators adopt.” They find that in state legislatures, legislators elected after the implementation of term-limits and who represent multi-member districts are more likely to see themselves as trustees (2006: 189). They also found “representation roles are influenced systematically by certain demographic factors, with legislators representing districts farther from the state capital, freshman legislators in non-term-limited states, female legislators, and legislators who are members of racial and

ethnic minorities being more likely to consider themselves delegates” (Cooper and Richardson, 2006: 189).

In theory, public opinion polls provide elected leaders with representations of the expressed will of the people. If a delegate model of representation is the goal, then it might be important that elected leaders pay attention to these polls. There are numerous critiques of polling that at the minimum cause us to balk at the idea of governing by polls though. Among other concerns, poll results do not always accurately reflect public opinion because of methodological issues such as question wording problems and sampling irregularities. Further, as Converse (1970) and others have noted people often express “nonattitudes” in public opinion surveys for a number of reasons. For one, people may not know enough about an issue to be able to express an informed opinion on it. I elaborate upon the concerns about modern public opinion polling later in this chapter.

Even before the invention of the modern public opinion poll, numerous scholars debated the role of public opinion in a democracy. Among the most outspoken was Walter Lippmann (1922; 1925) who argued that public policy should be made by elected representatives influenced by scientific experts, not by mass public opinion. Lippmann (1922) argued that for the most part, people did not form meaningful opinions about politics. Instead, opinions about politics were “pictures in people’s heads” that benefited their own cause. In other words, mass public opinion was not rationally informed and therefore, not very useful to elected representatives. Others, most notably, George Gallup, maintained that polls were useful tools for elected public officials. According to

Gallup, polls could be seen as a “mandate from the people,” a directive to elected representatives to enact or abandon a particular policy (Erikson and Tedin, 1995).

Another criticism of using polls to measure citizens’ preferences is offered by Ginsberg (1989) who argues that pollsters constrain the choices offered to survey respondents. According to Ginsberg, survey questions limit voluntary opinions on issues. Another important critique of polling is that “the assessment of public opinion takes place under an operational assumption of the simple aggregation of attitudes and preferences though the mechanism of polls” (Traugott, 2004: 79). However, as Traugott (2004) points out, in reports about polls the media does not weight accordingly the views of more informed or more active citizens nor those with more intense opinions on a particular issue. Therefore, the opinion represented in poll results may not be as useful to government leaders as representations of collective opinion that take into account respondents’ knowledge of the issues at hand and the intensity of their opinions.

Public opinion polls do not just connect the people to their government. They also might connect people to public policy in that they are a source of political information. Many people pay attention to polls and some may even find the information in polls useful when thinking about politics and public policy. But many others simply ignore these polls. Why might some people choose to pay attention to the potentially useful information included in poll results? There has been no shortage of research on why people do not use all of the political information to which they are exposed. For example, we know that information plays a critical role in electoral behavior. But since time and attention are scarce resources, voters cannot obtain and evaluate encyclopedic

political information. In fact, Americans know very little about the political world (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). This lack of information may be due in part to the limitations of human cognition-cognitive psychology studies illustrate the limitations in ability to process information (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Lau and Sears, 1986). This lack of political information may also be due to the lack of incentive to gather, store, and evaluate vast amounts of political information. Downs (1957) offers an explanation for why voters have little incentive to pay attention to all of the political information they encounter.

Downs (1957) looks at voting as utility-maximizing behavior and condenses voting into a cost-benefit analysis. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) further develop Downs' model in their discussion of the "calculus of voting" in which the decision to vote is based on the perceived benefits of voting for one party over the other, taking into account the costs associated with voting. The costs of voting include the costs of acquiring, storing, and digesting political information. Downs recognizes the limitations of information gathering in that it requires the allocation of scarce resources such as time, energy, and cognitive effort. He argues that individuals will try to reduce their information costs by transferring procurement, analysis, and evaluation of information on to others and by using sources of free information such as political parties and interest groups. Therefore, rational voters will try to reduce information costs, since it is not rational to spend time and energy gathering and evaluating information that may not add anything "in terms of a better decision or increased confidence in the present one" (Downs, 1957: 241). Since the probability of casting the tie-breaking vote is essentially

zero, there is no incentive for voters to absorb the information costs of making a better vote choice.

To reduce the costs of voting then, people do not use all of the information to which they are exposed. In many cases, they rely on information shortcuts, cues that substitute for more detailed political information (Popkin, 1994: 14). Information shortcuts are also referred to as heuristics “mental shortcuts that require hardly any information (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000; Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991). Information shortcuts are useful in reducing the amount of cognitive effort an individual has to exert in obtaining, storing, and evaluating information (Popkin, 1994). For example, voters can obtain political information by looking at party and interest group endorsements (Lupia, 1994). Perhaps no information shortcut contains as much information as political party (Popkin, 1994). Other shortcuts that people use when making political decisions include media messages (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987) and elite opinion (Brody, 1991; Carmines and Kuklinski, 1990; Mondak, 1993).

People might use polling information as an information shortcut. Polling information is everywhere in the media. Therefore its procurement costs are very low. As far as cognitive costs, the media often absorbs this for its consumers through its interpretation of poll results. However, as I discuss in chapters two and three, the quantity and quality of interpretation of poll results vary by media source. Polling information still informs citizens about their fellow citizens' opinions. Polling information then might help people with little information about a particular policy by

serving as a low-cost cue. Lupia (2002) makes it clear though that people don't use all of the cues available to them when making political decisions. Instead,

[e]ach person must choose which cues to use. If we want to understand how cue usage affects behavior, then we should endeavor to explain how people sort among the many cues available to them. We must be precise about what differentiates a persuasive cue, one that changes attitudes, from a cue that does not persuade (Lupia, 2002: 56).

Lupia (2002) and Lupia and McCubbins (1998) base their model of persuasion in part upon Hovland, et al. (1953) who found that persuasion depends on credibility.

Hovland and his colleagues found that whether a speaker was considered credible depended in part on whether he was seen as having expertise and trustworthiness (Lupia, 2002: 57). Lupia (2002) and Lupia and McCubbins (1998) show whether an individual uses a particular cue depends on his or her perception that it is credible, which in part, depends on whether the individual believes that the *speaker* is knowledgeable about the subject at hand. Lupia (2002: 61) argues that “[p]erceived common interests and perceived speaker knowledge are each necessary for persuasion.” I propose that citizens who are exposed to public opinion polling information judge the credibility of that information based upon their perception of the knowledge of the people whose opinions are represented in the poll results and based upon their perceptions of the interests of those people. Some also judge its credibility based upon their perception of the interests of the source of that polling information, namely the conductors of the poll, and the media. They might also judge the credibility of polling information based upon their perception of the knowledge held by the media and polling organizations about polling

methods. In short, citizens might use polling information as a low-cost cue and incorporate it into their political thinking, but only if they find it credible.

First, citizens' perceptions of the credibility of polls depend on their perception that those who conducted the poll are competent at conducting polls. Citizens who have a better understanding of scientific polling methodology will likely perceive academic polls and those conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup as more credible and thus have more favorable perceptions of these types of polls. People who have a better understanding of polling methodology will likely find media polls as less credible, because of the influx of unscientific polls in the media and because of the uncritical reporting of polls in the media. People who understand the importance of probability sampling will likely not have favorable impressions of media polls because even when probability sampling is used in media polls, reports about polls in the media do not adequately explain its significance. Or even worse, media reports including poll results may misinterpret polling information, such as margin of error, thus making the polling information less credible to consumers. I analyze how citizens' perceptions of scientific polling methodology affect their perceptions of different types of polls and polling organizations in chapter five.

Moreover, an individual's perception of the credibility of polling information depends upon his or her perception of the knowledge of those whose opinions are represented in poll results. If citizens do not have confidence in the opinions of their fellow Americans on issues of public policy, then these citizens will not use public opinion poll results as a cue when making their own political decisions. Moreover, they

will likely believe that government should not pay attention to this polling information given that it is not credible information. In order to show support for these arguments, it is first necessary to gauge citizens' perceptions of the political judgments of their fellow Americans. In chapter six, I create a variable that measures respondents' perceptions of the judgments of their fellow citizens about several areas of public policy such education, the economy, and foreign policy. In short, I find that respondents' confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans in these policy areas does affect whether they pay attention to poll results when making their own political decisions and whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making important decisions for the nation.

In addition, before citizens use polling information as a cue, they must not only perceive that their fellow Americans are knowledgeable about a particular subject, they must also judge that the source of the polling information is knowledgeable. In other words, the source of the polling information, the media, must be adequately and correctly able to interpret the polling information. In general, citizens have low levels of knowledge about polling methodology; therefore, they look to the media to evaluate these polls for them, much in the same way that they as voters look to the media and other sources they trust to evaluate political information in an election. Popkin (1994) uses a "police patrols v. fire alarms" analogy to illustrate how it is rational for voters to use other sources they trust, such as the media and elite opinion, as shortcuts for evaluating political information. He argues that rather than searching out relevant political information and attempting to determine what is accurate and meaningful, like police

officers patrolling their beat, it is more cost-effective, and therefore rational, to rely on the media and elites to “pull fire alarms” to let voters know that there is a problem (1994: 49). Thus relying on trusted sources can serve as shortcuts in evaluating political information. However, if the sources are not knowledgeable, then using them to evaluate this information is not rational.

The problem here is that members of the media for the most part are not well-trained enough to interpret polls. In addition, little methodological information is presented in reports about polls, making it difficult to compare and critique polls. Further, media outlets vary in their reporting of methodological information. Therefore, consumers of different news media are exposed to very different polling information. These differences might affect their perceptions of the credibility of particular polls and polls in general. For instance, if an individual is an avid television news watcher, she might be exposed to more self-selection polls and might therefore assign more credibility to these types of polls. She might then find polls conducted on random samples as not credible. I discuss these concerns later in this chapter and in chapter three. But for now, consider two recent examples of polling information presented in the media.

CNN’s Lou Dobbs offers viewers of his nightly news program *Lou Dobbs Tonight* the opportunity to participate in an Internet poll every night. Early in the broadcast, Dobbs explains the topic of the nightly poll and then asks viewers to cast their votes at LouDobbs.com. He tells viewers that the results of the poll will be available later in the broadcast. While offering the opportunity for viewers to give instant feedback about an issue that interests them is arguably a good thing, the way that Dobbs presents

the nightly poll results is troubling. For example, in a program that aired October 25, 2005, Dobbs asked viewers “Do you feel ripped off by the major oil companies? Yes or no?” At the end of the broadcast, Dobbs said, “[t]he results of our poll tonight, overwhelming, 98 percent of you say you feel ripped off by the major oil companies” (Dobbs, October 10, 2005). The people represented in the poll selected themselves. Therefore, who is the “you” in Dobbs’ poll results? Is he referring to those who logged in their opinions or is he attempting to generalize these results to his audience or to the entire nation?

Another recent example involves a poll reported in the *Los Angeles Times* in a story entitled “Voters Dislike 3 of Governor's Ballot Measures” written by Times Staff writer, Michael Finnegan. Finnegan cites a *Times* poll in his story:

Also in trouble is Proposition 75, Schwarzenegger's plan to require public-worker unions to get written consent from members each year before spending dues on political campaigns: 40% are for it, and 51% against it...Beyond the ballot contests, the poll confirmed a steep dive in Schwarzenegger's popularity. His 69% job approval rating a year ago has plummeted to 40%... (November 2, 2005).

At the end of this story, the *Los Angeles Times* included the following methodological information: the sample size, the dates the survey was conducted, the sampling frame (likely voters in the November 8th special election), the screening process to determine likely voters, how the sample was chosen (RDD), and that multiple attempts were made to contact each number. In addition, the *Times* included the following information:

Additional Latino voters were contacted in a separate random sample to allow more accurate analysis of their subgroup. Adults in the entire sample were weighted slightly to conform with their respective census proportions by sex,

ethnicity, age, education, region, and party registration figures from the California Secretary of State. The margin of sampling error for registered voters and likely voters is plus or minus three percentage points. For certain subgroups, the error margin may be somewhat higher. Poll results may also be affected by factors such as question wording and the order in which questions are presented. While voters of all racial and ethnic groups were interviewed and are included as part of the overall results, some may comprise too small a subgroup of the sample to be separately reported. Interviews in all samples were conducted in both English and Spanish (Finnegan, November 2, 2005).

This only offers a snapshot of how polling information is presented in the media; but from these two examples, it is clear that viewers of *Lou Dobbs Tonight* and readers of the *Los Angeles Times* are exposed to different polling information. These differences in the way polls are reported in different media outlets mean that citizens vary in their exposure to polling information, especially in their exposure to scientific polling methodology. This likely results in varying levels of trust of scientific polling methodology. In short, some people are more likely to believe that using scientific polling methodology is a more valid way of gauging public opinion. Others, who are not as familiar with scientific polling methodology, such as those who rely solely on television news for their news about politics and public affairs, might be less willing to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology. I elaborate upon this and test several hypotheses about the relationships between media exposure and the belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology in chapter four.

Whether an individual's media source affects his or her belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology is also related to the second dimension of credibility. In order to determine whether people will use polling information as a cue, they must perceive that the speaker or the source of information has interests common to theirs.

What if some people simply do not trust the media because they perceive it as biased against their beliefs? They would not find the media a credible source and would likely find the polling information presented in the media as being less credible. The theory I lay out in chapter two has some roots in the research on the hostile media effect. The hostile media effect explains how partisanship directly affects perceptions of the media and the public opinion polls reported in the media.

Gunther and Schmitt (2004: 55) define the hostile media perception as “the tendency for partisans to judge mass media coverage as unfavorable to their own point of view.” Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985: 577) argue “[r]ather than perceiving confirmation and support, partisans frequently claim to perceive hostile bias, even in news coverage that most nonpartisans find even-handed and objective.” The hostile media effect helps to explain why different groups can see the same news coverage as biased against their respective interests. “Since partisans see the generally moderate political stance of the media as leaning away from their own more partisan political views, that may explain why the media are repeatedly and simultaneously attacked by critics on the Left and Right for their political beliefs” (Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt, 1998: 121). Several experimental studies have shown support for the hostile media effect. Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) found that after watching samples of various television news coverage of the Beirut massacre, “both pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans rated these programs, and those responsible for them, as being biased against their side” (577).

Previous studies have shown that the hostile media effect is a result of partisanship; however, Gunther (1992) examined how group identification affected perceptions of media bias. He found that among several religious, racial, and partisan groups, there was evidence of the hostile media perception. Or more succinctly, “group membership does indeed play a role in public perceptions of the fairness or credibility of mass media” (Gunther, 1992: 161). Several studies using survey data also offer evidence of the hostile media effect (Beck, 1991; Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt, 1998; Gunther and Christen, 2002; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, and Chia, 2001). While partisanship is at the core of the hostile media effect, there is evidence of other variables leading to the hostile media effect. For example, attention level is also an important component of the hostile media effect. Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) found that at lower levels of attentiveness, there was a stronger hostile media effect for partisans. Ideology may be another important component of the hostile media effect. Ideological conservatives may resist messages from what they perceive as the “liberal media,” including poll results (Barone, 1997; Safire, 1975).

The relationship between public perceptions of the media and public perceptions of representations of mass opinion requires more than evidence that groups perceive the media as biased against them however. Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, and Chia (2001) offer the theoretical bridge between perceptions of the media and perceptions of public opinion. They propose an indirect relationship between the hostile media effect and perceptions of mass opinion through the persuasive press inference. “The persuasive press inference proposes that individuals often infer public opinion from their perceptions

of the content of media coverage because of their assumptions that such content has a substantial influence on others” (2001: 298). They find that, in fact, partisans perceive the media as biased against their views, relative to the views of others. Further, they find that this hostile media effect affects the way that partisans perceive public opinion. Since the media is biased against their views, partisans perceive that public opinion, because it is influenced by the media, is also biased against their views (Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, and Chia, 2001).

If partisans believe that the media and public opinion reported in the media is biased against their beliefs, they will not perceive polling information reported in the media as credible, since they and the media do not have common interests. I theorize that partisanship and ideology affect citizens’ perceptions of the credibility of polling information. In chapter four, I analyze how ideology affects citizens’ belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology. In chapter five, I also analyze how the perception of common interests might affect an individual’s perception of polling organizations. Specifically, I discuss how partisanship affects citizens’ perceptions of media polls, academic polls, polls conducted by political parties, those conducted by nonprofit groups, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup.

I hypothesize that Republicans will find media polls as less credible because of their perception that the media is biased against their beliefs. I elaborate upon why Republicans more than Democrats might perceive the media as more biased against their beliefs in chapters four and five. I also hypothesize that partisans will find polls conducted by political parties as more credible given that they would have common

interests. In chapter two, I discuss how the hostile media effect offers part of the foundation for my model of how people perceive and use polling information. Before I elaborate upon my model however, it is important to discuss some of the previous research on polling and public opinion.

Literature Review

Key (1961: 14) defined public opinion as “those opinions held by private citizens which governments find it prudent to heed.” Moreover, Key argued that public opinion may be “the veriest whim, or it may be a settled conviction. The opinion may represent a general agreement formed after the widest discussion; it may be far less firmly grounded” (1961: 14). Key alludes to two important questions in public opinion research: what do public opinion surveys and polls measure and why are politicians, as well as the media, social scientists, and citizens so interested in their results?

Public opinion polls do not simply measure public opinion. The reporting of these poll results informs elected representatives, activists, and the media about citizens’ attitudes on issues. Turn to any local or national news station, cable news network, or Internet news site and you will often find a news report followed by poll results or an invitation for viewers to participate in a poll. There has been a recent explosion of call-in polls and other self-selection polls in the media, likely due to the vast amounts of media available today. Combined with straw polls and surveys using scientific methodology, these call-in polls are part of a seemingly endless flow of representations of public opinion reported in the media. What is important is that all of these polls may have an impact on individuals. Mutz (1992) found that representations of collective public

opinion-reports of survey results-influence individual issue attitudes. Joslyn (1997) also found that public opinion influences individual opinion, “yet the magnitude, directions, and significance of the effect depend critically on the target of public sentiments and the political predispositions of the perceiver” (337).

The persuasion effect of polls may be more subtle though. How the media frames survey and poll results can greatly affect how they are interpreted by the general public. While Mutz (1992) did not look specifically at polls reported in the media, she shows how polls and surveys presented as representations of mass opinion have the potential to shape public attitudes. The effect of exposure to public opinion polls on public attitudes towards issues is that these polls cue certain arguments in citizens’ heads (Mutz, 1992). It is not a process of mass opinion persuading citizens to change their attitudes or to form new attitudes, it is more a process of “self-persuasion” in which people “mentally rehearse” the arguments that others might make in order to justify their opinion on an issue (Mutz, 1992: 98). Therefore, media framing of polls might affect public attitudes by bringing to mind some arguments in favor of an issue and not others.

Jou, Shanteau, and Harris (1996: 9) call framing “a form of manipulating the salience or accessibility of different aspects of information.” Two polls might show the same amount of support for an issue; however, how a poll is conducted or described is a frame of reference that people might use to determine whether or not they should incorporate the information presented in the poll into their attitudes towards the issue. In essence, framing of a poll might explain why some individuals might change their opinions in response to a poll. How a poll is framed highlights important information for

media consumers such as “here are some scientific findings,” or “here is what people like you thought about this issue” and is likely to result in different individual opinions on an issue. These frames are cues to people that it is in their best interest to respond positively or negatively to the poll, either by adopting a new opinion, strengthening their preexisting opinion, or changing their preexisting opinion toward or away from the direction of the poll.

The public is bombarded with polls and these polls may move public opinion. More importantly however is that certain polls may be more persuasive to particular individuals and therefore persuasion effects may depend on the methodology of the poll and individual-level characteristics of people exposed to the poll. If the different methodologies of various representations of mass opinion affect citizens’ perceptions of their accuracy and, in turn, their attitudes on issues in different ways, then we need to reexamine how polls are reported in the media and how people use these polls to make political decisions.

For instance, polls using unscientific methodology and framed as “here’s what people like you thought” might be more credible to some media consumers. Polls using scientific polling methodology, those using probability sampling, might be viewed as inaccurate by some people. The term “random sample” might turn some people off-people who rely less upon science in day-to-day decisions and their perceptions of reality. People who do not understand or do not trust science are not likely to perceive polls that are described as using scientific methodology as accurate. For example, religious fundamentalists might not perceive polls described as using scientific methodology as

accurate representations of mass opinion because they rely less on science than they do on spirituality. Consider the belief among highly religious Christians, for example, that the creation of the world and all life forms was an act of God and not a result of evolution. There is an inherent distrust of science among religious fundamentalists and this distrust results in skepticism towards scientific discoveries, events or actions described as using science instead of spirituality.

The media not only frames polls, it also serves as the primary source of polling information for citizens. For example, the reporting of polls in the media is commonplace now in election coverage due to a number of reasons. Traugott (1992) shows that large news organizations established their own polling organizations. Other studies have confirmed that news organizations either created their own polling organization if they could afford to or commissioned polling data from other organizations if they could not (Demers and Nichols, 1987; Ladd and Benson, 1992; Rippey, 1980; Salwen, 1985). Public evaluation of the practice of polling has improved. In a 1996 Gallup poll, 87% of respondents responded that polls were “a good thing” (in Traugott and Kang, 2000); although Traugott (1991) pointed out that respondents thought that “horse-race” coverage of poll results was “a bad thing.”

In examining the media’s reporting of public opinion polls, Jacobs and Shapiro (1999) concluded that “polls are not only affecting the conduct of political battle; they are also influencing journalists, and by extension, Americans’ understanding of public opinion” (137). After their content analysis of nine well-known broadcast and print media, Jacobs and Shapiro (1999: 138) called reports about polls regarding Social

Security and other entitlements the “journalistic equivalent of a drive-by shooting.” They found that polls were “slipped into stories as a quick frame of reference or hook” and little if any methodological information was reported along with the polls (138-9). They argued that polls were presented as if they represented some “change” in public opinion, whether such change existed or not. They also argued that these polls were presented in such a way as “to skirt the substantive issues at stake in favor of covering the political game” (142). Others have confirmed the lack of methodological information in media reports of polls (Cantril, 1991; Herbst, 1993). While polling methodology has vastly improved over time, many members of the media are not well-trained enough to interpret survey results and there is a great deal of uncritical reporting of public opinion data (Elving, 1989; Herbst, 1993; Roper, 1983).

The paucity of methodological information and interpretation of polls is a potential problem if you consider that polls affect individual opinion. Mutz (1992; 1998) finds evidence that polls, as representations of collective opinion, do not so much have a direct effect upon individual attitudes, beliefs, and opinions as an indirect effect in the form of “impersonal influence.” Mutz (1998: 4) defines “impersonal influence” as “influence that derives from people’s perceptions of others’ attitudes, beliefs, and experiences.” Further, she contrasts the “others” to which she refers with the close friends and acquaintances at the core of the Columbia model of voting behavior. Instead, impersonal influence is “brought about by information about the attitudes, beliefs, or experiences of collectives outside of an individual’s life space” (Mutz, 1998: 4). People are generally exposed to representations of collective opinion in the form of public

opinion polls through the media; therefore, people learn about these attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of others from the media.

Mutz (1998: 5) argues that “[m]ass media undoubtedly facilitate the influence of anonymous others by devoting considerable time and attention to portraying trends in, and states of, mass opinion and experience.” Mutz (1992) finds that the effect of public opinion on public attitudes depends on the salience of an issue or the degree of commitment people have towards an issue. In a national telephone survey experiment, she found that on those issues in which there was high commitment, public attitudes moved away from mass opinion on an issue and on issues in which there is low commitment, public attitudes moved towards mass opinion (1992: 103). In her second national telephone survey experiment, she found that public attitudes moved towards mass opinion on both the high and low commitment issues; however, she conceded that the “high commitment” issue in the second experiment was probably not as high in commitment as the “high commitment” issue in the first experiment (1992: 107). She suggests that one reason why public opinion might move away from public opinion poll results is that people may bring up “counterarguments” in their heads when exposed to these polls and that these counterarguments will affect their opinion on the issue.

Many scholars believe that the opinions contained in these representations of collective opinion are not all equal however. There is a great concern among many scholars that people do not answer survey questions with true attitudes. Feldman and Zaller argue that people do not have “true preferences,” but instead “a series of partially related and often inconsistent ones;” therefore, using surveys as a tool to measure

revealed preferences is difficult (1992). I elaborate more upon whether surveys measure true attitudes later in this chapter, but I first consider two models of survey response and opinion formation.

Alvarez and Brehm (2002) develop a model of survey response, they argue puts them in contrast with Zaller (1992) and Zaller and Feldman (1992). At the core of the Alvarez and Brehm model are the predispositions that respondents have over many political and policy domains (2002: 17). Instead of relying on strong beliefs to answer a question, survey respondents “construct one from their predispositions” (2002: 17). In contrast to the Zaller and Feldman model of survey response, predispositions “organize respondents’ answers to survey questions and do not serve solely as filters for incoming information. Thus survey response can be less variable, and less context-dependent” than the Zaller and Feldman model (2002: 17). Alvarez and Brehm (2002) suggest that their model offers a “middle ground” between those theories that posit that citizens possess deeply-held core values and beliefs (Rokeach, 1973) and the Zaller and Feldman model.

Zaller (1992) also developed a theory of opinion formation that adds to findings of Zaller and Feldman (1992). Zaller (1992: 35) abandons the “conventional but implausible view that citizens typically possess ‘true attitudes’ on every issue about which a pollster might inquire, and instead propose[s] a model of how individuals construct opinion reports in response to particular stimuli that confront them.” Zaller’s (1992: 2) goal in *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion* is to “integrate as much as possible within a cohesive theoretical system.” Zaller’s model of opinion formation includes considerations as a core component of opinion. Chong (1996: 195) offers a more

expanded definition of considerations; they are “feelings and beliefs that originate from information acquired through discussion, personal experience, and the media.” Chong argues that people can choose to accept or reject the arguments that they encounter and those they accept form “the reservoir of considerations that are available for evaluating an issue” (1996: 195). According to Zaller (1992), when asked for their opinion on an issue, individuals form opinions by averaging across the most salient considerations in their mind at the moment they are asked. It is those considerations that are at “the top of the head” that will come to mind most quickly and thus affect survey responses.

More specifically, in *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*, Zaller offers his theory of public opinion formation that focuses on four key components: that 1) “citizens vary in their habitual attention to politics and hence their exposure to political information and argumentation in the media;” 2) that “people are able to react critically to the arguments they encounter only to the extent that they are knowledgeable about public affairs;” 3) that “citizens do not typically carry around in their heads fixed attitudes on every issue on which a pollster” may ask; “rather they construct ‘opinion statements’ on the fly as they confront each new issue;” and 4) “in constructing their opinion statements, people make greatest use of the ideas that are, for one reason or another most immediately salient to them”-at the “top of the head” (1992: 1).

Zaller offers four axioms: Reception, Resistance, Accessibility, and Response. The Reception Axiom is that the greater cognitive engagement a person has with an issue, the more likely he or she will be exposed to political messages about that issue (1992: 58). The Resistance Axiom is that “people tend to resist arguments that are

inconsistent with their political predispositions,” but only to the extent that they possess the information necessary to connect the argument with their predisposition (1992: 58). The Accessibility Axiom is that more recent considerations will take less time to bring to the “top of the head” (1992: 58). Finally, the Response Axiom is that people answer survey questions by “averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them” (1992: 58).

The study of how people might use survey results in forming opinions fits well within Zaller’s model. Survey results are but one consideration that citizens may have at the “top of their heads” when forming opinions about a candidate or issue. The study of whether people believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology also fits within Zaller’s broad framework and relies most on Zaller’s Reception and Resistance Axioms. Individuals who are exposed to the news will likely encounter survey and poll results. One of the goals of this study is to examine whether the medium by which people receive their news affects their belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology.

Individuals who rely on the newspaper are exposed to more scientific polls and more polling methodology. Individuals who rely more on television news are exposed to more unscientific polls or to scientific polls with little if any methodological data reported. Therefore, individuals who rely on television news are less likely to be exposed to information about the methodology of polls. In fact, Weiss and Singer (1988: 234) found that “[o]nly 31 percent of focus newspaper stories about surveys, 25 percent of those in newsmagazines, and none of those reported on television” in 1982 included interpretation or analysis. Moreover, Paletz, et al. (1980: 505) found that sample size was

given in 67% of New York Times stories and in 26% in television (CBS and NBC evening news) news stories. Further, Larson (2003) found that although there has been an increase in the amount of information included about sampling error in reports about polls in television news stories, sampling error was often misinterpreted in these television news reports.

Next, Zaller's Resistance Axiom offers a theoretical rationale for why individuals might not believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology. Ideological conservatives because they perceive as the media as having a liberal bias, might reject scientific poll results from the media. Conservatives might see scientific polls as another way of injecting the liberal bias. Thus even well-educated conservatives may simply not believe that using a random sample of 1500-2000 people is a valid way to gauge public opinion.

Zaller's model, the research on the hostile media effect, and Mutz offer us the foundation of a model of how people perceive polling information and whether not they pay attention to polls or believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. Before I describe this model however, I offer a brief discussion of modern opinion polling so that we might have a better understanding of some of the criticisms of polling in a democracy.

Assessment of Modern Polling

Modern scientific public opinion polling relies on probability sampling and other devices designed to minimize error. Question wording effects, interviewer effects, and other sources of error are minimized in order for surveys and interviews to accurately

represent the opinions of the respondents. With all of the precautions taken to minimize error and the use of probability sampling for selecting respondents, scientific public opinion polling is a well-respected means by which to measure public opinion. There are still numerous criticisms of modern polling however that must be addressed. It is not just unscientific polling that some critics argue misrepresent public opinion because of systematic error; even scientific opinion polling has the potential to introduce systematic error into a research study. The major methodological problems that to some degree plague all scientific surveys fall under three general headings: 1) nonresponse, 2) nonattitudes and response instability, and 3) faulty instrumentation and interviewer effects. One of the biggest criticisms of unscientific surveys is that their results are not generalizable; however, the problems that face scientific polls may make their generalizability questionable as well sometimes.

Sample surveys have become an indispensable tool of the social scientist (Converse, 1987); however, the methodological pitfalls associated with survey research are much discussed. First, the issue of nonresponse is important in polling and survey research not simply because there are so many people unwilling to offer their opinions in these surveys, but because there may be major differences between those individuals who do answer survey questions and those who do not. No matter how much effort is put into selecting a random sample, a high nonresponse rate can greatly affect the validity of the survey and make the results “much less valuable” (Herbst, 1993: 125). The crux of the nonresponse problem is that those who refuse to participate may be different than those who do participate “on one or more dimensions,” making survey results difficult, if not

impossible, to generalize (Herbst, 1993: 125). Scientific surveys use probability sampling to avoid the problems associated with self-selection, namely the inability to generalize results to a larger population; however, some critics argue simply refusing to be surveyed is a form of self-selection (Goyder, 1986).

The increase in the nonresponse rate to surveys has been attributed to a number of factors. Herbst (1993) points to increased urbanization as a factor contributing to high nonresponse to personal interviews. Increased fear of strangers, tighter building security, and longer working hours all result in fewer face-to-face interviews. In addition, there is a high nonresponse rate to telephone surveys. Caller I.D., where potential respondents can screen calls and refuse to answer the telephone when they do not recognize the caller contributes to the lower response rate (Groves and Lyberg, 1988). Moreover, the poor, the elderly, the less educated, and those who do not speak English as their native language may have increased difficulty answering survey questions on the telephone (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988; Herbst, 1993).

High nonresponse rate affects the validity of a survey; however, a potentially larger threat to the validity of a survey project is whether the attitudes measured in a survey are the “true attitudes” of the individuals surveyed. Berinsky (1999) suggests that the problem with measurement of responses to survey questions is more than revealing preferences, but also the social interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. Berinsky argues that what answers respondents give in public opinion surveys are affected by what “social sanctions” they might face if they gave their true opinion. He found that the “don’t know” response was a way to avoid a “socially undesirable”

opinion on school integration (1999). He argues that this selective response is akin to self-selection by the respondent.

In addition, previous research has shown that respondents may answer “don’t know” when they are unsure of their opinions, whether on issues or about political candidates (Krosnick and Milburn, 1990; Schuman and Presser, 1981). Krosnick (1991) argues that respondents may answer “don’t know” even if they have opinions and that in some cases, they just don’t want to take the time or mental work to formulate an answer. Other respondents may fear that others do not share their opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). Furthermore, some studies have found that the presence of a third party during an interview can affect survey responses (Aquilino, 1993; Zipp and Toth, 2002).

One theoretical argument is that people do not have consistent and meaningful attitudes about issues (Converse, 1964; Converse and Markus, 1979; Feldman, 1989; Krosnick, 1988; 1990; Markus, 1982). Feldman and Zaller (1992) argue that instead of true preferences, people have “a series of partially independent and often inconsistent ones.” Others argue that although survey responses do fluctuate, people do have stable and “true attitudes” (Achen, 1975; 1983; Dean and Moran, 1977; Erikson, 1979). These previous studies suggest that fluctuations in survey responses are likely due to “measurement error” that results from vague survey questions intended to determine attitudes and opinions.

Zaller and Feldman argue that both of these theories of response instability (nonattitudes and measurement error) are deficient. They point out that there is more than this random response variance (that is explained away as measurement error by

some); there is also systematic variance that results from response effects. The race of the interviewer, the ordering of the questions, whether there are open questions or not all affect responses to survey items. According to Zaller and Feldman, “the literature on response effects makes it clear that survey questions do not simply measure public opinion. They also shape and channel it by the manner in which they frame issues, order the alternatives, and otherwise set the context of the questions” (582). This affects the study of political opinion because it may be the survey that elicits responses, not the true preferences of respondents. There is the possibility of response effects in that surveys themselves may shape responses and people may use surveys to determine their own “attitudes” (Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber, 1984; Zaller, 1984).

The third general category includes these problems of interviewer effects and faulty instrumentation or differences in instrumentation that even scientific surveys must attempt to minimize. First, interviewer effects are seen in surveys, even telephone surveys. When respondents are asked questions that have race relations content, race of the interviewer may contribute to response bias (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988; Schuman and Converse, 1971). In addition, gender of the interviewer may contribute to response bias if the content of the questions is related to sexual relations and attitudes (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988).

One explanation offered for what seems to be unstable public opinion is a result of survey question wording—that it is the survey instruments that are unstable (Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Krosnick and Berent, 1993). Poor, ambiguous, or even simply different question wording affects the validity of survey projects. Even small differences

in question wording can result in differences in responses (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988; Mueller, 1973; Tversky and Kahneman, 1982). Question format, whether open or closed questions, affects responses as well (Schuman and Presser, 1981; Schuman and Scott, 1987).

Question ordering and response ordering also affects the validity of a study. Questions can affect respondents' opinions on other questions later in the interview (Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber, 1984; Schuman and Presser, 1981; Tourangeau and Rasinski, 1988; Tourangeau et al., 1989). Bradburn and Sudman (1988: 186) argue that “[t]he order in which the questions are asked may create a context for interpreting them; therefore, when the order is changed, the context-and hence the respondents’ interpretation-may also change.” In addition, response ordering can also affect responses. For instance, name ordering in questions about candidate preferences has been shown to affect responses (Krosnick, 1991; Miller and Krosnick, 1998).

Modern scientific surveys come in three formats: face-to-face, telephone, and mail surveys; although there has been a recent effort to conduct scientific Internet surveys. Most major surveys are conducted face-to-face or by telephone; therefore, the focus of this section is on the differences between the two, including the strengths and weaknesses of each. First, telephone surveys have a major advantage over face-to-face interviews in terms of cost; telephone surveys are much cheaper to conduct. In addition, telephone surveys ensure quick turnaround time and “the possibility of closer supervision of interviewers to assure greater standardization of administration” (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick, 2002: 1).

There are several disadvantages to telephone surveys as well. Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2002) point out that telephone interviewers cannot use “show cards” in their interviews, making some questions impossible to ask or some responses difficult for respondents to conceptualize. More importantly however is that there is no way to reach respondents for a telephone interview if they do not have a phone. Individuals with no telephone have no chance of being selected for a telephone interview. There is a systematic bias in that these people are likely different from those that were interviewed, at least in terms of income. In addition, nonresponse is a problem in all surveys; however, there are higher rates of nonresponse for telephone surveys (Groves, 1977; Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick, 2002; Mulry-Liggan, 1983; Shanks, Sanchez, and Morton, 1983; Weeks, Kulka, Lessler, and Whitmore, 1983).

As a result of the increased levels of nonresponse to telephone surveys, there is an underrepresentation of the poor (Greenfield, Midanik, and Rogers, 2000; Groves and Kahn, 1979; Shanks, Sanchez, and Morton, 1983; and Weeks, et al., 1983), racial minorities (Greenfield, Midanik, and Rogers, 2000; Klecka and Tuchfarber, 1978; Mulry-Liggan, 1983), the less educated (Greenfield, Midanik, and Rogers, 2000; Groves and Kahn, 1979; Shanks, Sanchez, and Morton, 1983; and Weeks, et al., 1983), and the elderly (Klecka and Tuchfarber, 1979; Mulry-Liggan, 1983; and Weeks, et al., 1983) in telephone surveys. Comparing respondents to face-to-face interviews with respondents to telephone interviews, studies have found that telephone respondents tend to more educated, white, male, older, and have higher incomes (Gfroerer and Hughes, 1991; Groves and Kahn, 1979; Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick, 2002).

Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2002) point out that while there are reasons why individuals might not allow interviewers into their homes (fear of being robbed and privacy concerns), telephone interviews are more likely to exclude “vulnerable” groups like the poor and racial minorities because there is more suspicion of telephone interviewers. Unlike interviewers conducting face-to-face interviews, it is difficult for telephone interviewers to assuage the fears of respondents through professional, nonthreatening, and friendly nonverbal behavior and professional appearance.

Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2002) examined this issue and found differences between telephone interview respondents and face-to-face interview respondents. They found that telephone respondents were more likely to engage in satisficing, giving responses to questions that seem reasonable, but without exerting much cognitive effort in coming up with these responses. They looked at three forms of satisficing: choosing an explicitly offered no-opinion response option, non-differentiation, and acquiescence. They described nondifferentiation as “selecting a reasonable-appearing point and sticking with it across objects” when asked several questions requiring ratings of multiple objects using the same scale (2002: 9). They defined acquiescence response bias as “the tendency to agree with any assertion, regardless of its content” (2002: 9). They found support for their hypothesis that telephone interview respondents engaged in all three forms of this satisficing behavior.

Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2002) also found that social desirability plays a role in responses to survey questions. They argue that this social desirability response bias is more likely to occur in telephone interviews than in face-to-face interviews

because respondents and interviewers engaged in a face-to-face interview may establish more impersonal trust and that this might ease respondents' concerns about the confidentiality of their responses (2002: 11).

Therefore, depending on the methodology employed, even two different types of scientific surveys can potentially show different results. Holbrook, Green, and Krosnik (2002) offer suggestions as to improve telephone interviewing and make the results of such interviews more closely resemble results from face-to-face interviews. They suggest that slowing the pace of telephone interviews and sending out advance letters explaining the telephone interview might reduce the suspicion that people have about telephone interviews (2002: 39). There is a tradeoff that researchers must make in conducting a survey project; the cost of conducting the surveys is a limitation on the methodology employed.

There are methodological problems associated with scientific surveys and these problems vary in kind and in degree between types of survey; however, scientific surveys are still more reliable in the ability to generalize their results to the larger population under investigation. Numerous methodological advancements such as weighting have improved the accuracy of scientific surveys. There is general consensus that scientific polls are not perfect, but they are reliable. And the only way to generalize results of a poll is to use probability sampling. Unscientific surveys cannot be used for generalization. Whether there is any value to unscientific surveys then still remains to be addressed.

Determining whether a survey is scientific or unscientific has become difficult due to the inconsistency with which methodological details are reported along with poll results. Public knowledge of polling methodology is weak at best anyway. A majority of the public does not understand how a randomly selected sample of 1500-2000 people can reflect the opinion of the U.S. population (O'Neil, 1996). Lavrakas (1991) found that about one-third of the sample he surveyed understood the concept "margin of error." Although most people do not understand the specifics of polling methodology, one study found that there was a correlation between reporting of probability sampling methods and assessments of the survey being trustworthy and objective (Salwen, 1987). However, Mosier and Ahlgren (1981) found no such relationship existed. Either way, the public's lack of knowledge about polling methodology is troubling "because a sound foundation of familiarity with polling concepts could be the key to the public's developing critical analytical and interpretive skills" (Traugott and Kang, 2000). Despite the low levels of knowledge people have about polling methodology or accuracy, Traugott and Kang (2000) find that the public pays attention to polls.

The reporting of unscientific polls in the media is not a recent occurrence. Before modern public opinion polls, straw polls-unscientific polls conducted by newspapers and magazines-were quite popular. In 1824, the first straw poll was conducted by the *Harrisburg Pennsylvanian* (Gallup and Rae, 1940). Straw polls became part of the political landscape and reached a peak in the 1920s and early 1930s. According to Erikson and Tedin (1995), the media devoted considerable space to the results of straw

polls. Straw polls about candidates and about issues proliferated and they were well-respected until the *Literary Digest* fiasco of 1936.

The *Literary Digest* had conducted numerous straw polls since its first in 1916. While it had been wrong in its predictions of vote share before, the *Literary Digest* was humiliated by the results of the 1936 presidential election. Not only did the magazine get the winner of the election wrong for the first time, the *Literary Digest* under predicted Franklin Roosevelt's voter share by almost 20% (Erikson and Tedin, 1995). Thus, the stage was set for modern scientific polling methods. Although advances in sampling were made before the *Literary Digest* fiasco, the proponents of straw polls ignored it (Erikson and Tedin, 1995). George Gallup became one of the pioneers of modern public opinion polling in 1936. Although he and other pollsters relied on quota sampling that resulted in over or underestimation of vote share, Gallup used quotas to ensure demographic representation in his polls (Erikson and Tedin, 1995). Gallup used sampling procedures, not self-selection methods employed by the straw polls.

The methodological problems associated with self-selection are vast when the goal is generalization. Random sampling in surveys makes generalization possible by ensuring that every member in the population being studied has an equal probability of being selected. While sampling techniques vary, there are some groups that do not have an equal probability of being selected. For example, while a random-digit-dial sample can add households with unregistered numbers to the sampling frame, it cannot add households without telephones. Mailed surveys cannot reach people who are homeless. There are a number of examples of the limit of giving every person in a population an

equal probability of being surveyed; however, scientific surveys that rely on random selection (as random as possible) are generalizable to the entire population. Unscientific survey results are not generalizable; however, unscientific surveys have become again as much a part of the polling landscape as scientific surveys.

There are several instances though when unscientific surveys would be of more interest and for which researchers may find more use. The obvious example is when the results do not need to be generalized to a larger population. Probability sampling is unnecessary when one simply wants the opinion of the “man on the street.” Another more interesting situation where unscientific polls may be useful to researchers is in measuring opinion intensity. Measuring the number of responses from a call-in or internet poll and determining the characteristics of the respondents may be helpful in understanding the types of individuals who care so deeply about an issue that they are willing to take the time to register their opinion in an unscientific poll. It is arguably more costly to take the initiative to call a poll or log into a poll than it is to answer the phone and give opinions. What types of issues elicit responses to call-in polls might also help researchers determine the issues that are the most salient at a given time.

Herbst (1993) offers several uses for unscientific polls. She argues that straw polls in particular are a form of political discourse in that issues not given a lot of attention in the media and people not usually polled may have an opportunity to be heard. In addition, pollsters have the opportunity to pick the issues and candidates that would receive attention and about which there would be political discourse. Herbst (1993) also points to the “people’s polls,” polls taken by citizens to gauge the opinions of neighbors,

coworkers, and friends. Major newspapers published these polls, usually because they showed the newspapers' preferred candidates winning (80-81). With the methodological advancements that made scientific polling the preferred method of polling, "people's polls" began to decline, and as Herbst argues, did so at the expense of public discourse. These people's polls "conducted by college students, farmers, and others were attempts at knowing one's own environment. It was probably a quick, enjoyable way to have contact with one's neighbors, engage in social comparison, and participate in quasi-electoral politics at the same time" (Herbst, 1993: 83).

While modern scientific public opinion polling is useful in gauging mass opinion, there is little, if any opportunity for respondents to engage in political discourse. Having the opportunity to express one's opinion could potentially mobilize individuals. More informal unscientific polls might present the opportunity for individuals to engage in more discourse and thus further mobilize people to vote and remain politically active. Internet polls might present a good forum for this type of discourse. Internet polls might facilitate interest in politics and encourage greater debate about issues. These types of polls may not be useful for generalization; however, they would be very useful as tools for mobilization.

Therefore, while there are numerous methodological problems associated with unscientific polls, they may be useful in some situations. Scientific polls will still continue to be the best avenue for generalization though. How people perceive polling methodology is important to our understanding of how they might incorporate polls into their own political thinking. How the media presents polls, both scientific and

unscientific is also important to our understanding of how people perceive polling methodology. Therefore an empirical analysis of how people perceive polls should begin with an analysis of how polls are reported in the media. I do this in chapter three. In the next chapter however, I offer my model of how people perceive polls and what affects their decision to pay attention to polls when thinking about political issues and what affects their beliefs that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation.

Chapter II

Theory and Model

In this chapter, I propose a model of how people perceive public opinion polls and whether they pay attention to or expect government to pay attention to public opinion polling information that expands upon our previous understanding of how people perceive public opinion polling information. The previous research shows us that people are influenced by polls and that the nature and amount of polling information reported in the media varies by media source. Previous studies have also shown us that when evaluating information, people do make some judgment of the credibility of that information. Therefore, I incorporate these previous findings into my explanation of what factors affect citizens' views of polls in general and in their perception that polling information might be useful to themselves and to their government leaders.

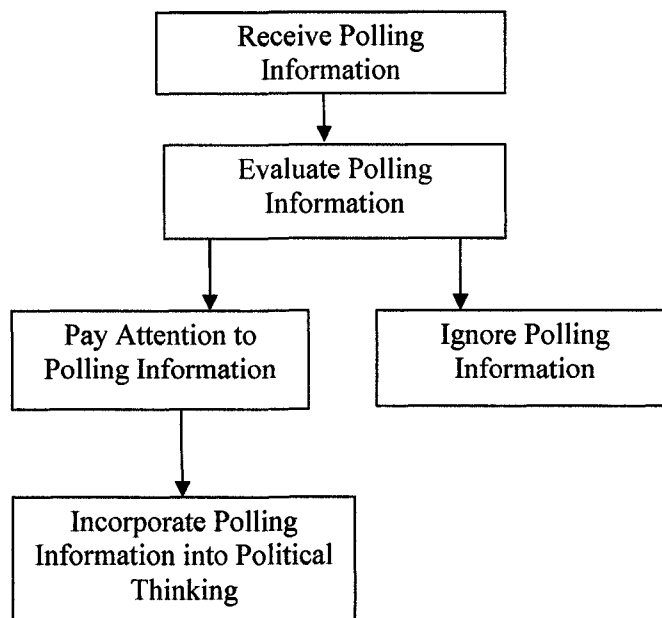
I believe that my theory of how citizens perceive polling information ties into the broader study of under what circumstances people will use information cues and which cues they will use. The model I propose has some roots in the research on persuasion in that I believe that in order for an individual to find polling information useful to them-in order for it to be persuasive-he or she must find it credible. Recall from chapter one that whether an individual uses a particular cue depends on his or her perception that it is credible, which in part, depends on whether the individual believes that the *speaker* is knowledgeable about the subject at hand (Lupia, 2002; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). Further, “[p]erceived common interests and perceived speaker knowledge are each necessary for persuasion” (Lupia, 2002: 61). I propose that an individual’s perception

that polling information is credible depends on whether he or she finds the source of the polling information and the people whose opinions are represented in the polling information knowledgeable. It also depends upon whether citizens perceive that the source of this polling information is not biased against them.

If citizens find polling information credible, they are more likely to incorporate it into their own political thinking. They might think about recent poll results when deciding between political candidates for instance. They might also respond to a survey question about their views on a particular public policy with recent polling information in mind. Therefore, my model also has some roots in Zaller's (1992) RAS model in that polling information is an additional "consideration" that people may have at "the top of the head" when they respond to survey questions or when they form political judgments about issues or candidates. The model I propose in this chapter utilizes the findings from this previous research and then builds upon these findings in order to more fully develop a theory of how people perceive polling information, whether they pay attention to it when making political decisions, and whether they believe that government should pay attention to it when making important decisions for the nation.

In brief, my model involves a three-step process. First, citizens are exposed to polling information in the media. Then they evaluate this information, judging the validity of the polling methodology and the credibility of the source of the polling information. Then they decide whether to incorporate it into their own political decision-making and their attitudes about whether government should incorporate this information into its decision-making as well. The model I propose is depicted in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Citizen Perception and Incorporation of Polling Information



My model takes into account the following assumptions:

1. The amount and type of polling information people receive is dependent upon their level of media consumption.
2. People at all levels of media consumption receive polling information because it is so prevalent in media reports.
3. Polling information may be an accurate representation of collective opinion (scientific poll/uses probability sampling) or inaccurate representation of collective opinion (unscientific/uses non probability sampling).
4. The methodology of the poll (scientific/unscientific) defines the frame of the poll.
5. News organizations vary in the amount of information they provide about survey methodology.
6. People vary in their belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology. Therefore, people vary in their ability to distinguish between polls that are scientific (unbiased representations of collective opinion) and unscientific (biased representations of collective opinion).
7. People vary in their level of trust of the political judgments of the collective whose opinion is represented in polls.

8. People vary in their level of trust of the media.
9. People vary in their impressions of polls and polling organizations.

Media Reports About Polls

First, people receive polling information from the media. The amount and type of polling information, such as methodological information depends on the media outlet from which people receive polling information. One consistent finding about polling is that the media extensively uses polls. Poll-based reporting has increased greatly (Fitzgerald, Rule, and Bryant, 1998). In fact, Fitzgerald, Rule, and Bryant (1998) find that more often, networks are conducting their own polls. Whether media outlets conduct their own polls or whether they commission polling data from other sources, the reporting of polls in the media is commonplace. For example, “[a]n examination of the stories featured in the covers of three leading newsmagazines-Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report-between 1995 and mid-2003 reveals that about 30 percent of them cited public opinion polls” (Asher, 2004: 3).

Overall however, it is clear that many media reports about polls are inadequate at best. A major criticism of media reports about polls is that there is insufficient methodological information and interpretation included in media reports about polls (Asher, 2004; Cantril, 1991; Herbst, 1993). In chapter three, I analyze how newspapers and television news programs present polling information to the public. As I discussed in chapter one, previous research shows that while in general the media does a poor job at reporting polling information, television news programs are considerably worse than newspapers at reporting this information. Therefore, we expect that people who receive

most polling information from televisions news programs will have different information in their heads about polls than people who receive most polling information from newspapers. In chapter three, I seek to confirm these previous findings by testing the following hypotheses:

H3A: Television news and newspaper reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards.

H3B: Television news reports about polls include less methodological information than do newspaper reports about polls.

H3C: Cable television news reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards.

Evaluations of Scientific Polling Methodology

People vary in the amount and type of polling information they receive depending on their source of news. Therefore, their perceptions of this polling information will vary as well. Their evaluations of polling information depend on a number of factors such as the source of the polling information, their ideology, their partisanship, and their education. In chapter four, I focus on citizens' evaluations of scientific polling methodology. One way that people judge the credibility of polling information is by evaluating polling methodology. Some people are more willing to believe that scientific polls are valid ways of measuring public opinion. I am interested in which factors affect an individual's belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology in order to have a better understanding of who might find scientific polls more credible.

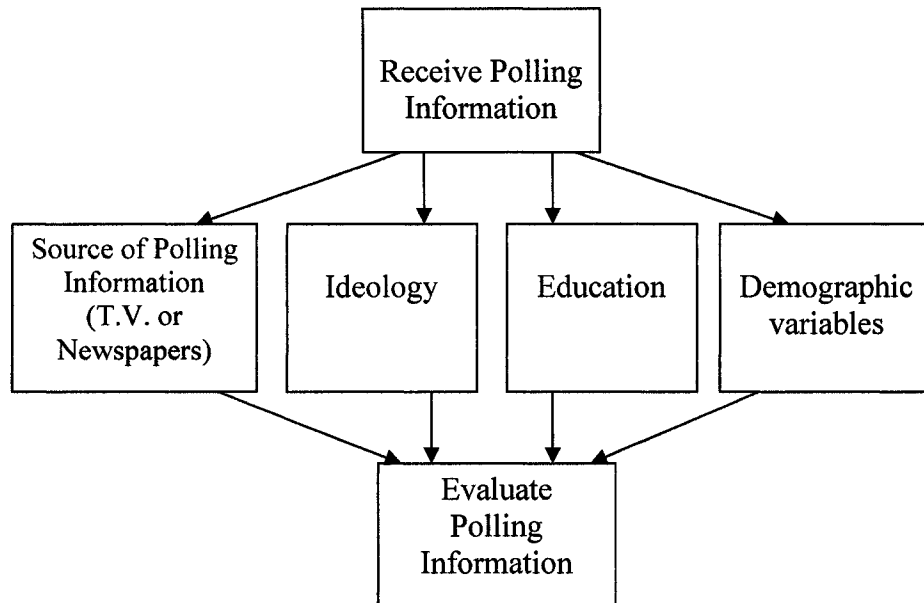
As I discussed in the previous chapter, and offer evidence of in the next chapter, information about polling methodology in reports about polls is scarce in television news. Therefore, television news viewers may be less willing to believe that scientific polls are

a valid way to measure public opinion. Newspaper readers are likely more willing to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology because they are exposed to more scientific polls and because scientific polling methodology is better explained in newspaper reports about polls than in televisions news reports about polls.

In addition, citizens' perceptions of polling methodology depend upon their perception that the source of the polling information is not biased against their interests. I expect that ideology then plays a big role here. Conservatives, because they believe that the media has a liberal bias, believe that the polls reported in the media are biased too. I predict that conservatives will be less likely to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology because of their perception that the media is injecting a liberal bias into the polls.

Further, more educated citizens may simply have more exposure to scientific polling methodology and also have more exposure to probability sampling or other statistical training. Therefore, they are more willing to believe that scientific polls are a valid way to measure public opinion. Thus citizens' evaluations of polling information, specifically their evaluations of scientific polling methodology depend upon their source of polling information, their ideology, and their education, as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Citizens' Evaluations of Scientific Polling Methodology



In chapter four, I test the following hypotheses:

H4A: Ideological conservatives are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

H4B: Individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

H4C: Individuals who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

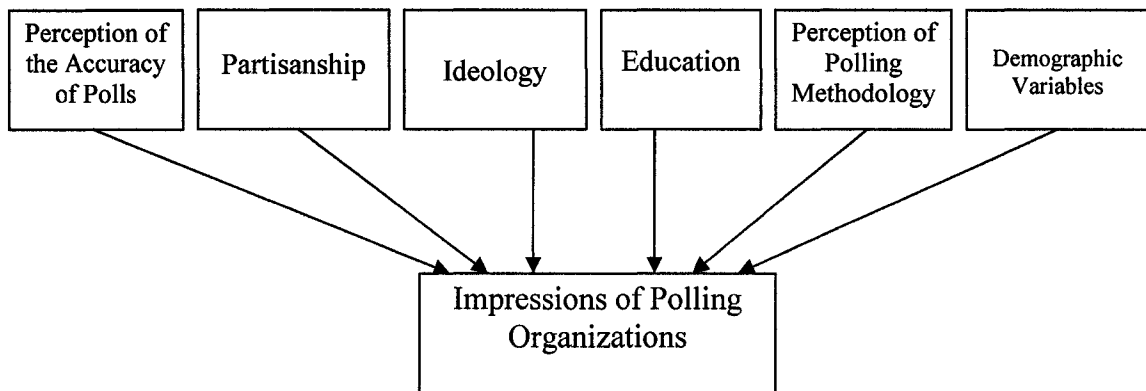
H4D: Individuals who obtain their news from television news programs are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

Citizens' Impressions of Polls and Polling Organizations

In addition to evaluating polling methodology, an individual also evaluates those who conduct polls such as the media, polling organizations and political parties, in order to judge the credibility of polling information. As I have previously discussed, whether

an individual perceives a source to be credible depends in part on his or her perception that they have common interests, or that it is not biased against their own interests. Some citizens might believe that poll results reported in the media have been “twisted” to say what the pollsters or media want. For the same reason that conservatives might perceive polls reported in the media as biased against their beliefs, some people might perceive some polling organizations as biased against their beliefs and therefore not have favorable impressions of them. It is important then to determine what factors affect an individual’s perceptions of these polling organizations. I do this in chapter five. In Figure 2.3 below, I illustrate what affects citizens’ impressions of polls and polling organizations.

Figure 2.3. What Affects Citizens’ Impressions of Polls and Polling Organizations?



Note that an individual’s perception of the accuracy of polls affects his or her impressions of polls and polling organizations. I expect that individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion will have favorable impressions of all of the types of polls included in the Kaiser survey I used to obtain the this data. I expect

that they will have favorable impressions of academic polls, media polls, polls conducted by political parties, those conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, and those conducted by nonprofit groups. If citizens perceive polls in general to be accurate reflections of public opinion, they might not see a distinction between each of these five polling organizations.

An individual's perception of a polling organization's knowledge of polling methodology might also affect his or her perception the polling information from this source is credible. For one, people who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology will be more likely to discriminate between these five polling organizations. I use two measures of perceptions of scientific polling methodology in chapter five.

First, I use the same measure as in chapters four, whether an individual believes that a random sample of 1500-2000 people can accurately reflect he views of the nation's population, or whether they believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology. I also use another measure of their perception of scientific polling methodology, specifically whether they think that there is an important distinction between scientific and unscientific polls. I expect that individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples will have more favorable impressions of polling organizations with reputations of conducting scientific polls. I expect that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology will have favorable impressions of these same polls and polling organizations-academic research center polls, polls conducted by nonprofit groups, and polling organizations such as Gallup.

I expect that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology and individuals who believe that there is an important difference between scientific and unscientific polls have less favorable impressions of media polls. As I discussed previously in this chapter and I explain in more detail in chapter three, reports about polls in the media included little methodological information. While more methodological information is included in polls reported in the newspaper, the Kaiser data I use to test these relationships does not ask respondents to distinguish between television news and newspaper polls. But I believe that individuals who understand the importance of scientific polling methodology will have less favorable impressions of media polls because of members of the media are not well-trained enough to interpret these polls. While media polls have improved over time, and many do have strong reputations, especially those affiliated with major polling organizations, such as Gallup, I think that for many people, media polls might still represent lower-quality polling.

We might also expect that more educated people are more likely to believe that scientific polling methodology is a better way to measure public opinion because they have been more likely exposed to some statistical or other mathematical training that would make them better able to understand the significance of using probability sampling methods. Therefore, better educated people should have favorable impressions of polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup and Harris. They are also likely to have favorable impression of polls conducted by academic research centers because if they have even a partial college education, they will have more familiarity with universities and other academic research centers and therefore find them more credible.

They are likely to perceive those who conduct academic research polls as more knowledgeable of polling methods, as well as more knowledgeable about the issues and subjects motivating the survey research.

Furthermore, previous work has consistently shown that more educated people are more involved in politics (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1996). Perhaps more among the more educated, there is a general distrust of polls commissioned by organizations that ostensibly have a political agenda, such as those conducted by political parties. People with higher levels of education might also be more aware of the lack of methodological training of many members of the media and therefore find media polls as less credible.

In addition, because of their perception that the media is biased against them, I expect that Republicans and conservatives will have less favorable impressions of media polls. However, because they are likely to perceive political parties as having interests common to their own, both Democrats and Republicans will have favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties. Therefore, in chapter five, I test the following hypotheses:

H5A: Individuals who perceive polls in general as accurate reflections of public opinion have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, media polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, polls commissioned by political parties, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

H5B: Republicans have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

H5C: Democrats and Republicans have more favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties, *ceteris paribus*.

H5D: Conservatives have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

H5E: More educated individuals have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

H5F: More educated individuals have less favorable impressions of media polls and polls conducted by political parties, *ceteris paribus*.

H5G: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

H5H: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

H5I: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random and nonrandom samples have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by media, *ceteris paribus*.

H5J: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

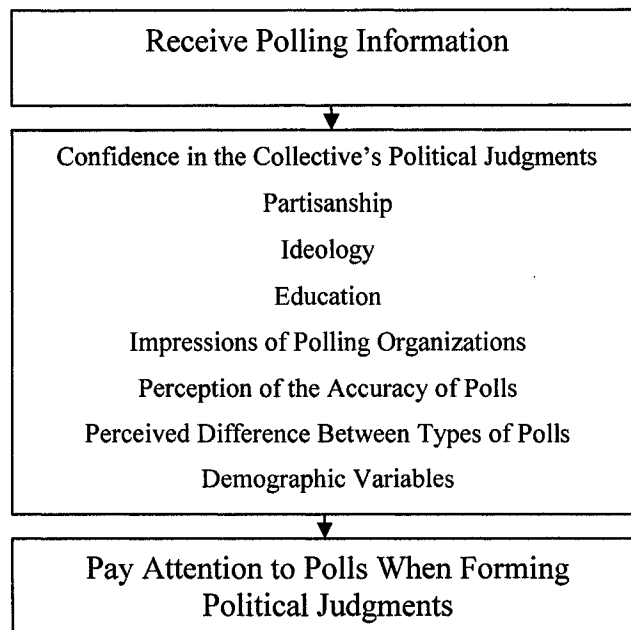
Who Pays Attention to Polls?

Citizens' impressions of polling organizations may help explain why some people might pay attention to polling information or expect government to pay attention to polling information when making political decisions. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, people do not use all of the political information shortcuts or cues to which they are exposed. Whether they are persuaded by cues depends upon whether they think that those giving the cues are knowledgeable and they perceive that they have interests common to their own (Lupia, 2002). First, citizens may not perceive that all polling organizations have interests in common with them. Republicans, for instance may not have favorable impressions of media polls because they perceive the media as biased

against them. Therefore, citizens' impressions of polling organizations might affect whether or not they incorporate polling information into their own political thinking.

Moreover, if individuals do not perceive the source of the information as knowledgeable, they will not use this information. If citizens do not believe that the opinions represented in poll results are knowledgeable, then this information is not useful to them. Therefore, citizens' confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens, whose opinions are represented in poll results, likely affects their decisions to use polling information when making political decisions. In addition, partisans, because of their familiarity with public opinion polls conducted by their own political parties, might be more willing to use polling information when making political decisions. Polling information might serve as a valuable information shortcut to partisans who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion. In Figure 2.4 below, I illustrate the factors that influence whether people use polling information in their own political thinking.

Figure 2.4. Factors Influencing Individual Attention to Polls



In chapter six, I test several hypotheses that stem from the model depicted in Figure 2.4. First, I hypothesize that people who do not trust the political judgments of their fellow Americans are not likely to use polling information as a cue when making political decisions. If they do not believe that people are capable of making sound political judgments, then poll results drawn from surveys with their fellow Americans are not useful to them. Recall that an individual's perception that the opinions represented in polling information is credible depends in part on whether he or she believes that the people represented in the poll are knowledgeable. If an individual does not perceive the people represented in the poll results as knowledgeable, then the poll results will not persuade them. This is information to which they will likely pay little or no attention when forming their own political judgments.

Furthermore, an individual's perception that polling information is accurate is important to their decision to pay attention to it when making political decisions. If people perceive that public opinion polls are not accurate reflections of public opinion, they likely perceive these polls as having some bias. If they perceive polling information as biased, they find it not credible and therefore not persuasive. The following two hypotheses are intended to test the relationship between an individual's perceptions of the political judgments of his or her fellow Americans and whether he or she pays attention to polls as well as between his or her perception of the accuracy of public opinion polls and whether he or she pays attention to polls when making political decisions.

H6A: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans pay less attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6B: Individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion pay more attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

Democrats and Republicans are likely familiar with the benefits of polling to political parties. Parties use polls to raise money and to strategize (Herbst, 1993; Lavrakas and Traugott, 2000; Meyer, 1989). Parties also conduct polls to assess public attitudes on issues and to discern candidate popularity (Herbst, 1993: 120). However, Democrats and Republicans do not view polls presented in the media in the same light. Democrats are less likely than Republicans to perceive the media as biased against them. Therefore, given that they understand the benefits of polling to their own party and they do not perceive the media as biased against them as Republicans do, Democrats are more likely to pay attention to poll results when making political decisions.

Conservatives do perceive the media as biased against them however. In a recent study, Pew found that 53% of Americans believe that news organizations are politically biased and twice as many say news organizations are "liberal" (51%) than "conservative" (26%), while 14% say neither phrase applies (July 13, 2003). Therefore, we might expect that conservatives will not find polling information reported in the media credible and therefore not pay attention to it when making their own political decisions.

H6C: Democrats are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6D: More conservative individuals are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

Individuals who have more favorable impressions of polling organizations likely perceive polling information more credible. They are more likely to pay attention to polling information and use it as a cue when making political decisions. More educated people are less likely to pay attention to polling information though. More educated people might have a better understanding of the pitfalls of survey research. They might have a better understanding of the effect of question wording and question ordering problems upon survey results. They are likely more aware of the impossibility of generalizing unscientific poll results to the population. Overall then, they might be more skeptical of poll results and not find them credible. Therefore, they are less likely to incorporate poll results into their own political thinking. Better educated individuals also have other sources of political information so they may not need to or want to rely on representations of collective opinion as information shortcuts. Moreover, more educated people might have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans

and thus not be persuaded by them. Therefore, I also expect to find support for the following two hypotheses:

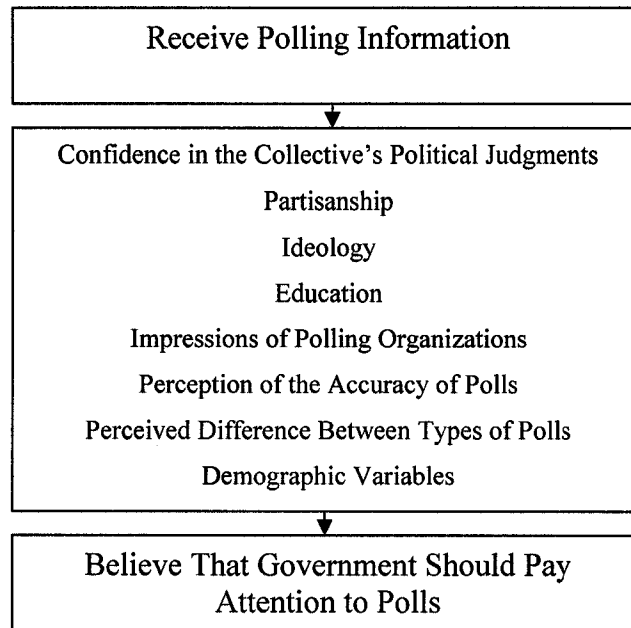
H6E: Individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6F: More highly educated individuals are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

Who Believes That Government Should Pay Attention to Polls?

Recall my discussion from chapter one about public opinion polls connecting citizens to their representatives. Some citizens might be more supportive of a delegate model of representation and want their elected leaders to pay attention to the public when making decisions for the nation. One way for leaders to learn about the needs of the citizenry is through public opinion polls. Therefore, we might expect some people to want their elected leaders to pay attention to poll results when making important decisions for the nation. However, there are a number of factors that affect an individual's belief that government should pay attention to poll results. These factors are the same that affect an individual's decision to pay attention to poll results when making his or her own political decisions. Figure 2.5 below offers an illustration of who believes that government should pay attention to polls.

Figure 2.5. Factors Influencing Citizens' Beliefs that Political Leaders Should Pay Attention to Public Opinion Polls



In chapter six I test several additional hypotheses. First, I propose that individuals who do not feel that their fellow Americans are capable of making good political judgments do not want the government to pay attention to poll results when making decisions for the nation. If they do not find the political judgments of their fellow citizens credible, then they do not want their government to use this information in the governing process. People who do not trust the judgments of their fellow citizens may in fact want more of a trustee model of representation. I examine this idea further in chapter six.

I also expect that individuals who do not perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion do not want government to pay attention to polls when making political

decisions for the nation. If polling information is not accurate, then it offers no valuable information to government. In chapter six I test these two additional hypotheses:

H6G: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6H: Individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

I also expect partisanship and ideology affect an individual's belief that government should pay attention to polls. For the same reasons that they might be more willing to pay attention to poll results, Democrats might be more willing to believe that government should pay attention to poll results. Democrats are likely to see the benefits of polling, especially to members of their own political party. The party can be more responsive to its members if it knows about their positions on the various policy issues. Furthermore, partisans have higher levels of internal and external political efficacy (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1996). Rosenstone and Hanson (1996: 141-142) argue that "[c]onfidence in one's ability to understand politics and faith in one's capability to practice politics-internal efficacy-and belief in the influence of one's actions on the decisions of government-external efficacy-help to overcome the constant suspicion that participation is hopeless." This feeling of external efficacy in particular might drive partisans to believe that government should pay attention to polls.

Democrats are not as likely to perceive poll results reported in the media as biased against their interests. However, Republicans do perceive the media as biased against them. Therefore, even Republicans with high external efficacy are not likely going to

want government to pay attention to poll results reported in a biased media. I also expect conservatives, because they perceive the media, and by extension polls reported in the media, as biased against them, to not want government paying attention to polls when making political decisions. Therefore, I test the following hypotheses in chapter six:

H6I: Democrats are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6J: More conservative individuals are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

In chapter six, I also analyze how citizens' impressions of polling organizations and their education level affect their beliefs about government paying attention to public opinion poll results when making decisions for the nation. I expect that individuals who have more favorable impressions of polls will find polling information more credible and want government to pay attention to it.

More educated people will likely want government not to pay attention to poll results. As I discussed previously in this chapter, individuals with higher levels of education might be more aware of the methodological problems associated with survey research. Even if they believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology, they might have a better understanding of the effects of question wording and question ordering on survey responses and therefore be a little more skeptical of using poll results as an information shortcut. In addition, better educated people might believe that the general public does not have a grasp on the issues and are therefore not competent to make sound political judgments. More educated people might want their elected leaders

to rely on their own judgment. Or they might want their representatives to pay attention to citizens who are more knowledgeable than the general public, such as those in interest groups or those who attend town hall meetings. I examine these ideas in more detail in chapter six. I also test the following two hypotheses:

H6K: Individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6L: More educated individuals are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

In the chapters that follow, I test these hypotheses to determine whether there is support for my model of how people perceive polling information and whether they pay attention to it or expect government to pay attention to it when making political decisions.

Chapter III

How Does the News Media Report Polling Information?

In this chapter, I analyze what information about polling and surveys citizens receive from the media. I am interested in examining the differences in reporting about polls and surveys among newspapers, network television news programs and cable television news programs. The media extensively uses polls and therefore citizens are exposed to a great deal of polling information in the media. But the news media outlets vary in their reporting of polls results and these variations may affect how people perceive polls and polling methodology. In this chapter, I test three hypotheses about media reports about polls. My findings here help us to better understand why citizens vary in their perceptions of polls. One reason might be that they are not all exposed to the same information in media reports about polls.

One clear finding by previous research is that poll-based reporting has increased greatly (Fitzgerald, Rule, and Bryant, 1998). In fact, Fitzgerald, Rule, and Bryant (1998) find that more often, networks are conducting their own polls. Whether media outlets conduct their own polls or whether they commission polling data from other sources, the reporting of polls in the media is commonplace. For example, “[a]n examination of the stories featured in the covers of three leading newsmagazines-Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report-between 1995 and mid-2003 reveals that about 30 percent of them cited public opinion polls” (Asher, 2004: 3).

Overall however, it is clear that many media reports about polls are inadequate at best. A major criticism of media reports about polls is that there is insufficient

methodological information and interpretation included in media reports about polls (Asher, 2004; Cantril, 1991; Herbst, 1993). Moreover, while polling methodology has vastly improved over time, many members of the media are not well-trained enough to interpret survey results and there is a great deal of uncritical reporting of public opinion data (Elving, 1989; Herbst, 1993; Roper, 1983).

As I discussed in chapter one, Jacobs and Shapiro (1999) offer one interpretation of how polls are reported in the media. Noting the lack of methodological detail and substantive interpretation in reports about polls, they concluded that “polls are not only affecting the conduct of political battle; they are also influencing journalists, and by extension, Americans’ understanding of public opinion” (1999: 137). After their content analysis of nine well-known broadcast and print media, they called reports about polls regarding Social Security and other entitlements the “journalistic equivalent of a drive-by shooting” (138). They also noted that polls were “slipped into stories as a quick frame of reference or hook” (138-9).

Television news programs and newspapers slip polls into stories perhaps to give the story more credibility. Citing polls, specific and anonymous, might be seen as a way to reassure media consumers that the story is legitimate because there is some polling behind it. Atkin and Gaudino (1984) point out that polls themselves might be conceptualized as news. “Such information is generally concrete, objective, and a product of a well-defined and organized system of record. Opinion surveys usually deal with politically relevant subjects such as candidate evaluations and feelings about public issues, and are therefore consistent with the high news value accorded political subjects”

(1984: 122). In addition, Atkin and Gaudino (1984: 119) point out that “[f]indings from opinion surveys also play a role in editorial commentary and endorsements and provide an important resource for journalists in their adversarial relationship with government leaders.”

Whether their motivation is simply to inform citizens about public opinion about an issue or public figure, bolster the credibility of a news report, or provide information to elected leaders about the opinions of their constituents, there are variations in how media outlets report the details of polls. Because of this variation, it is difficult to determine whether polling information is reliable or should be trusted. To deal with this problem, several organizations have adopted standards the media and others should adhere to when reporting poll and survey results. For example, the National Council on Public Polls (NCPP) has adopted a Principles of Disclosure which requires member organizations to include the following with survey results released to the public: who sponsored the survey, the dates of interviewing, the method of obtaining the interview, the population that was sampled, the sample size, information about the subsample, if applicable, question wording, and the “percentages upon which the conclusions are based” (Asher, 2004: 105).

Asher (2004) also points out that the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) have specified minimum standards for disclosure about how a particular poll was conducted. “Both organizations recognize that it is difficult to expect the media, polling organizations, and the like to devote substantial time and attention to the

methodological aspects of a poll, but they both agree that there is at least a minimum body of information that must be disclosed” (Asher, 2004: 105).

Asher summarizes the American Association of Public Opinion Research’s minimum standards:

1. Who sponsored the survey and who conducted it.
2. The exact wording of questions asked, including the text of any preceding instruction or explanation to the interviewer or respondents that might reasonably be expected to affect the response.
3. A definition of the population under study and a description of the sampling frame used to identify that population.
4. A description of the sample selection procedure, giving a clear indication of the method by which the respondents were selected by the researcher, or whether the respondents were entirely self-selected.
5. Size of samples and, if applicable, completions rates and information on eligibility criteria and screening procedures.
6. A discussion of the precision of the findings, including, if appropriate, estimates of sampling error, and a description of any weighting or estimating procedures used.
7. Which results are based on parts of the sample, rather than on the total sample.
8. Method, location, and dates of data collection. (Asher, 2004; AAPOR, 1986).

Previous studies have shown that newspaper and television news programs do not adhere to these standards well. There have been a few studies examining how polls are reported in newspapers and in television news. One of the most extensive offered a direct comparison between newspaper reports about polls and network television news programs’ reports about polls.

Paletz and his colleagues (1980) conducted an extensive content analysis of poll reports by the CBS and NBC evening news programs and the *New York Times* in 1973, 1975, and 1977. They chose these particular years “in order to avoid the abundance of election-related polls which litter the media during presidential election years and would skew the data” (Paletz, et al., 1980: 495). They examined every poll reported in these

three media outlets during these years and found that reports about polls vary. First, the *New York Times* reported about polls more often; it published 380 news stories including poll results during the time frame under study. NBC reported 83 polls in the same three years. CBS reported 40 polls in the same time period. Paletz et al. acknowledged that if they had included reports about polls in midday and morning new programs on CBS and NBC as well as their special reports, there would have been more polls reported on both networks. However, the Vanderbilt Archives, from which they obtained copies of these news broadcasts, did not have copies of these other programs.

Paletz and his colleagues also found “[n]ot only are polls abundant in the *Times* and on the networks’ news program, they are often prominently placed and accorded substantial time or space” (1980: 498). Additionally, they found that a majority of both television news stories (64%) and *Times* stories (78%) about polls “were based on and about polls rather than involving one or more polls as part of another, wider news story” (498). They also analyzed the content of polls reported in these sources, including polls about public policies and political figures. And despite their attempt to avoid the inclusion of too many election polls, they found a proliferation of elections polls in each of the three sources (1980: 499).

Paletz, et al. found that the number of reports in the network news and the *Times* in each of these areas was similar. However, in two other categories of polls they found differences between the *Times* and the network news programs. They found that during the time period they examined, the *Times* allocated more space and attention to “polls dealing with the general aspirations and behavior of Americans” than did the television

news programs (1980: 501). They also found that *Times* also devoted more attention to polls about foreign events (1980: 501). The differences between the *Times* and the two network news broadcasts in their reports about polls did not end there however. Paletz and his colleagues found that there were differences in the way the methodological and other procedural details were reported in the *Times* and in the network news programs.

Paletz and his colleagues found that NBC and CBS identified the organization that conducted in the reported poll 97% of the time. The *Times* identified the conductor 90% of the time (1980: 503). Moreover, in 75% of reports involving polls in the *Times* and in nearly every network news report about polls the sponsor was not identified. In fact, in 10% of the *Times* stories, they identified a sponsor who “might conceivably benefit from the polls and accompanying news stories” and half of these they identified as clearly serving the sponsor’s interests (1980: 504).

Reporting of methodological details such as sample size, sampling error, question wording, refusal rates, and survey dates varied as well. In reports about polls in the *Times*, sample size was given 67% of the time, compared to only 26% of the time in CBS and *NBC Nightly News* reports about polls. Further, sampling error was reported in only 7% and refusal rate in only 3% of *Times* reports. Television news’ percentages were even lower (1980: 505). Complete question wording was omitted in 95% of television news stories and in 70% of *Times* stories about polls. Further, the order of the questions in the poll was not reported in either the network news programs or in the *Times*. Finally the dates of the survey were included in 43% of the *Times* stories and in 30% of those on television news (1980: 505).

We can conclude from these results that television news programs do a worse job than newspapers of adhering to AAPOR standards. But Paletz, et al. found that overall, methodological details are not reported to any great extent in either the *New York Times* or in the CBS and NBC evening news programs. Miller and Hurd (1982) did a more extensive examination of how newspapers conformed to AAPOR standards. They examined reports about polls in three major newspapers—the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*—from 1972-1979.¹ They did not look at the AAPOR standard of reporting the basis of results when less than the whole sample is used because “it was rarely applicable” (1982: 245). They also acknowledged the difficulty in analyzing the conformity rates to the sponsorship standard. First, syndicated polls with an explicit sponsor commonly include “piggyback” questions—those tacked onto to externally funded polls and “this practice cannot be discerned from manifest content” (Miller and Hurd, 1982: 245). Further, newspaper polls “were deemed to have met the standard if the report explicitly stated the newspaper was the sponsor or named another sponsor” (1982: 245).

They found that the newspapers adhered to the AAPOR standards in their reporting of sample size 85% of the time and of reporting sponsorship 82% of the time. Sampling error was reported 16% of the time. They noted that the three newspapers did not differ significantly in their conformity to these standards. They found that conformity was “significantly higher in election polls than nonelection polls for all standards except sample size and sponsorship” (1982: 246). For instance, question wording was included

¹ See Miller and Hurd (1982) for a complete description of how they chose their sample.

in 71% of election polls and in 34% of non election polls (246). They also found that conformity varied by the source of the poll, noting that conformity to the question wording, sampling error, and method standards were highest for newspaper sponsored polls (247).

While newspaper conformity to AAPOR standards is higher for election polls and those where the newspaper is the source, conformity to these standards in newspaper reports about polls is still not great. But it still looks good compared to conformity to the standards by television news. Adding to the general findings by Paletz, et al., Larson (2003) found that even though reports about sampling error had improved in television news, it was often misinterpreted in these television news reports. In her study of network news coverage of the polls in the 2000 election, Larson (2003) also found that television news reports about polls often failed to mention that sampling error was even larger for subgroups for which poll results were reported.

We should expect then that citizens will vary in their perceptions of polling information, specifically polling methodology, depending on the source from which they receive this information since television news and newspapers differ in their inclusion of methodological details in reports about polls. I test this expectation in chapter four. In this chapter, I seek to confirm these previous findings about how newspapers and television news programs report polls. In general, I expect that both newspapers and television news programs do not adhere to the AAPOR standards well. I also expect that television news programs conform to these standards less than do newspapers.

I add to these previous findings in that I expect to show that despite the fact that reports about polls have increased vastly since these previous studies, conformity to the standards has not increased. Further, I examine how a popular cable news program reports polls to determine if having more air time improves the conformity to the standards by television news programs. I expect that although cable news programs may have more time to report polls, they do not report more details about these polls. I believe that even cable news broadcasts do not include more methodological details about polls because producers might believe that doing so will not be as exciting to viewers as using the broadcast time to cover more visual aspects of the day's news.

In this chapter, I test three hypotheses:

H3A: Television news and newspaper reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards.

H3B: Television news reports about polls include less methodological information than do newspaper reports about polls.

H3C: Cable television news reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards.

To test these hypotheses, I performed a content analysis on reports about polls in the *NBC Nightly News*, CNN's *The Situation Room*, and the *New York Times*. I chose the *Times* and *NBC Nightly News* to compare the results to those of Paletz, et al. I chose CNN's *The Situation Room* because of its popularity and because it is broadcast during primetime. While Nielsen ratings rank Fox News programs higher than those on CNN, CNN actually has more viewers. Fox's Nielsen ratings are higher because its viewers watch for longer periods, where CNN has more total viewers. This is based upon another Nielsen measure called the cume, which is short for the "cumulative total number of

viewers who watch a program for at least six minutes in a given day” (Rendall). CNN’s cume is about 20% more than FOX (Rendall).

While this content analysis offers only a snapshot of media reports about polls, it does offer an enlightening view of what information about polls citizens are exposed to through the media and may help us to understand why citizens vary in their knowledge or acceptance of the validity of scientific polling methodology, their trust of polls in general, and even their incorporation of polls into their thought processes about politics and government. This chapter is especially important to my overall study because two major assumptions in my model of how citizens perceive and use polling information is that citizens vary in their exposure to polling information and that they receive polling information from the media. If different media outlets offer different information in their reports about polls, it is understandable that citizens might perceive polls and polling methodology differently dependent upon the type of media to which they are exposed.

In the section that follows, I describe my research design for the content analysis. I then discuss the results of the hypothesis testing.

Content Analysis Research Design

Following Paletz, et al., I examine how polls were reported in the news. However, my research design differs from theirs in several ways. First, I only looked at how the news media reported polling and survey information in a one-year period, from August 10, 2005 to August 9, 2006. I chose this one-year period to focus on more recent reports about polls. Like Paletz and his coauthors, I examine reports about polls in the *New York Times* and the *NBC Nightly News*. But instead of looking at an additional

network news broadcast, I analyze how a major cable news network reports polls.

Because of its longer broadcast, CNN's *The Situation Room* presumably has more time available to offer more details in reports about polls, although I do not expect that it will include more details about polls than the *NBC Nightly News* includes in its reports about polls.

Paletz and his colleagues found that in 1973, 1975, and 1977, the *New York Times* published a total of 380 news stories using public opinion polls (1980: 497). They used the *New York Times* index that they noted was not an "entirely reliable guide" because they found that some articles were missing, nonexistent, or had nothing to do with polls (497). They did not count polls "of specific limited groups in American society, such as doctors" or Nielsen ratings (497). They also did not include stories "with only passing references to polls but without data" (497). The authors noted that 11% of the polls items in the *Times* appeared on the front page (498).

I used the Lexis Nexus database to search for stories about polls and surveys in the *New York Times*. I found an overwhelming 4919 stories that included poll or survey as a key term in stories from August 10, 2005 to August 9, 2006. I narrowed my search to only include stories about polls or surveys in the front page of the *Times*. In the one year that I looked at, there were a total of 372 stories in Section A, page 1 that included the words "poll" or "survey" in the *Times*. Because of the sheer number of stories in the *Times* and the other two sources, I sampled the stories, using a random number generator to choose the sample of 30 stories. Like Paletz, et al., I found a number of these stories in the *Times* were not actually about public opinion polls or surveys. In fact, of the original

sample of 30 stories, I found that almost one-half of them were not related to public opinion polls and replaced them with additional randomly selected stories. Two common examples I found of this were stories that referred to people going to the polls to vote or officials surveying the damage after Hurricane Katrina. Assuming that these stories are also randomly distributed among the 372 total stories, I would estimate that there were just fewer than 200 stories in Section A, page 1 of the *Times* that included reports about polls and surveys in the one-year period from August 10, 2005 to August 9, 2006.

Unlike Paletz and his colleagues, I did not exclude stories that included polls of limited groups, although only a couple ended up in the sample. I also did not exclude stories that contained passing references to polls or surveys. One of the major criticisms of how the media covers polls and surveys is that they are simply thrown into stories without much interpretation. I believe that the media's passing references to polls in stories exacerbates this problem. I believe that in their attempt to add more information or more credibility to a story by making a passing reference to a poll, members of the media are further adding to citizens' lack of understanding of how polls are conducted and how they should be interpreted. In my opinion, it decreases the value of polls and surveys as a source of information to citizens and does not add credibility to stories. Therefore, I include stories that make passing references to polls and surveys in each of the three sources. In the analysis, I do look at how specific polls and surveys are reported as well though.

Paletz and his colleagues obtained copies of the NBC and CBS nightly news programs from the Vanderbilt Television Archive. At the time, the Vanderbilt Television

Archive did not include weekend news programs, morning news programs, or midday news broadcasts. The authors used the Vanderbilt Television News Index to find stories that included reports about polls and surveys. They noted several difficulties in this process—for one, beginning in 1976, the index listed polls by pollsters only (1980: 498). They noted that they missed some of the “more obscure polls of 1977” (498).² They ordered the videotapes and watched the complete broadcasts to code the details of the stories that included polls and surveys.

I performed the content analysis of the *NBC Nightly News* differently. I obtained the transcripts of the stories on the *NBC Nightly News* from Lexis Nexus and found a total of 174 stories that included reports about polls or surveys during the one-year period under examination. I used a random number generator to choose 30 stories. Of these 30, eight had nothing to do with opinion polls and were replaced by additional randomly chosen stories.

I also obtained transcripts of CNN’s *The Situation Room* from Lexis Nexus; however, *The Situation Room*’s transcripts are categorized by hour of broadcast, not by individual story. *The Situation Room* is broadcast from 4pm to 6pm and from 7pm to 8pm Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday. The transcripts are compiled in one-hour segments—from 4-5pm, 5-6pm, and 7-8pm. I found a total of 529 one-hour segments of *The Situation Room* that included reports about polls or surveys. I randomly selected 30 of these segments and found only one had nothing to do with polls and had to be replaced. I can use these segments to analyze how *The Situation Room* reports polls

² See Paletz, et al. (1980) footnote 4 for a full discussion.

and surveys. But I cannot directly compare their coverage to that by the *NBC Nightly News* and the *New York Times* because I chose the 30 stories in those samples from a sampling frame of stories, not by broadcast or daily front page.

I coded each of the stories from the three sources based upon their conformity to AAPOR standards. I determined whether the story included the question wording, the definition of the population, a description of how the sample was chosen, the sample size, the response or completion rate, sampling error or interpretation of sampling error, any discussion of weighting that might have been done, any results on subsamples, if applicable, and the time, location, and method of the survey. I also coded whether the story included who conducted the survey or who sponsored it. Many of the media outlets conduct their own surveys without external sponsorship. Because of this, I did not directly compare how the three sources reported the sponsor of the polls in their stories. Instead, I combined sponsor and conductor into one measure of conformity.

Results

In Table 3.1 below, I compare the stories in the *Times* and the *NBC Nightly News* in their conformity to AAPOR standards.

Table 3.1. Conformity to AAPOR Standards by the *New York Times* and NBC Nightly News

	<i>New York Times</i> N=33 ³	<i>NBC Nightly News</i> N=31 ⁴
conductor and/or sponsor	60.6%	41.9%
question wording	12.1%	.032%
definition of the population	27.3%	.065%
how sample was chosen	.060%	0.0%
sample size	18.2%	.032%
response or completion rate	0.0%	0.0%
sampling error/interpretation	.063% ⁷	0.0%
weighting ⁵	.063%	0.0%
results on subsamples ⁶	0.13%	.032%
time, location, method	21.2%	.097%

These results lend support to **H3A**: Television news and newspaper reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *NBC Nightly News* conforms well to the AAPOR minimum standards for disclosure. The results also show support for **H3B**: Television news reports about polls include less methodological information than do newspaper reports about polls. In fewer than half of their stories about polls, the *NBC Nightly News* mentioned the sponsor or who conducted the poll. The *Times* only offered this information in 60% of its stories about polls. It is difficult for citizens to judge the credibility of a poll if they do not know who conducted it or who sponsored it. For instance, if the sponsor is not mentioned, citizens cannot

³ Three of the 30 stories made mention of two polls or surveys each.

⁴ One of the 30 stories made mention of two polls.

⁵ not always applicable

⁶ not always applicable

⁷ One of the surveys was upon a population; therefore N = 32.

determine whether the sponsor might benefit from the results. Question wording was rarely mentioned in either source. Complete question wording was offered in only 12% of *Times* stories and in less than 1% of *NBC Nightly News* stories. Given the effect that question wording can have on responses, the lack of conformity with this AAPOR standard is troubling.

Neither source offered much information about the population or the sample in their stories about polls. A definition of the population or the sampling frame was included in only 27.3% of the stories in the *Times*. In the NBC news, less than 1% of the stories described the population or sampling frame. Less than 1% of the *Times* stories and none of the NBC news stories included information about how the sample was chosen. Sample size was included in 18.2% of the *Times* stories, but in less than one percent of the NBC News stories. Response or completion rates were not offered in either source. Sampling error was offered or interpreted in less than one percent of the stories in the *Times* and in none of the NBC news stories. Information about the survey times, locations, or the methods used to conduct the survey was only offered in 21.2% of the stories in the *Times* and in less than 1% in the *NBC Nightly News* stories.

Because weighting and results on subsamples are not always applicable and because it is difficult to determine whether the results presented are on a subsample, I will not make comparisons between the two sources here. But in their conformity to the other AAPOR standards, the *Times* does a much better job than the *NBC Nightly News* in general. Specifically, it does a much better job at reporting the conductor or sponsor of

the poll, the question wording, the definition of the population, the sample size, and the time, location, and method of the survey or poll.

As mentioned previously, the media often casually makes passing references to polls and surveys in stories. The results above are based upon a content analysis of all of the stories in the two samples, including those which made only passing references to polls or surveys. For instance, a typical example of such a story is one from the *Times* from February 8, 2006 entitled “Some Democrats Are Sensing Missed Opportunities.” The story referred to “opinions polls indicating the public is souring on the Republican Party” without giving actual poll results or referring to a specific poll (Nagourney and Stolberg 2006). Another example from the *NBC Nightly News* is from a story aired on November 4, 2005. The story about how Americans view the economy included the claim “recent polls indicate many Americans think the economy is in poor shape” (*NBC Nightly News*). Both of these polls could be seen, in the words of Jacobs and Shapiro (1999) as a “drive-by shooting” in that they are just thrown at viewers with no details about them included. Media consumers do not have the opportunity to judge the credibility of these polls or the opportunity to even determine if the media outlet’s use of them as evidence in support of some claim is even accurate.

These passing references to polls in television news and newspaper stories clearly violate AAPOR standards and likely affect citizens’ perceptions of polls and polling methodology. This practice also undermines the credibility of polls, including those conducted and reported in accordance with AAPOR standards. Because of this, the news media needs to reexamine this practice of making passing references to polls in their

reports. Which source is worse in making these passing references to polls and surveys? I found that in 9 of the 33 total references to polls in the 30 story sample of the *New York Times*, were made in passing. In 10 of the 31 total references to polls in the 30 story sample of the *NBC Nightly News*, the poll was referred to in passing only. This casual reporting of polls it seems is done to roughly the same degree by both the *Times* and the *NBC Nightly News*.

In order to compare my findings to those by Paletz, et al. (1980) and others, I analyzed how well the *Times* stories and those on *NBC Nightly News* conformed to AAPOR standards, excluding those stories which made only passing reference to polls or surveys. Table 3.2 below summarizes these findings.

Table 3.2. Conformity to AAPOR Standards by the *New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News*, (excluding stories with passing reference to polls)

	<i>New York Times</i> N=24	<i>NBC Nightly News</i> N=21
conductor and/or sponsor	83.3%	61.9%
question wording	17.4%	.048%
definition of the population	41.7%	.095%
how sample was chosen	13.0%	0.0%
sample size	25.0%	.048%
response or completion rate	0.0%	0.0%
sampling error/interpretation	.087%	0.0%
weighting ⁸	.083%	0.0%
results on subsamples ⁹	20.8%	.048%
time, location, method	29.2%	.143%

In general, I found that even after excluding the stories which made only passing references to polls, there is support for my first two hypotheses. In making reference to a

⁸ not always applicable

⁹ not always applicable

specific poll or poll results, the *Times* only included the name of the sponsor or conductor of the poll about 83% of the time. NBC included this information only 62% of the time. It appears that both the *Times* and the *NBC Nightly News* have not improved in their reporting of conductors since the 1970s. In fact, the evidence here indicates that they conform even less to this AAPOR standard. It is difficult to compare their rates of including the sponsors of polls since the Paletz study in 1980. But Paletz and his colleagues found that the *Times* reported the conductor of the poll in 90% of their stories about polls and NBC reported it in 97% of their stories about polls (503).

Paletz et al. found that the *Times* reported sample size in 67% and NBC reported it in only 27% of their stories involving polls. I found sample size reported in only 25% of *Times* stories and in less than 1% of *NBC Nightly News* stories about polls. Paletz and his coauthors also found that the *Times* included the dates of the surveying in 43% of their stories about polls. I found that only in 29.2% of their stories about polls did the *Times* include any information about the dates of the surveying, the location of the surveying, or the method of the survey. I found that NBC reported this same information in less than 1% of its stories about polls. Finally, Paletz, et al. found that the *Times* included complete question wording in fewer than 30% of their stories about polls; NBC included it in fewer than 5% of their stories about polls. I found that this too seems to have gotten worse in the last several decades. I found that the *Times* reported complete question wording in just over 17% of their stories and in less than 1% of the NBC stories about polls.

Neither the *Times* nor the *NBC Nightly News* conform to the AAPOR standards well, but would a cable news program perform any better? I looked at how CNN's *The Situation Room* reported polls and surveys to determine how well it conformed to the AAPOR minimum standards. Overall, I found support for **H3C**: Cable television news reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR standards.

Table 3.3. Conformity to AAPOR Standards by CNN's *The Situation Room*

	percentage
conductor and/or sponsor	57.1%
question wording	12.2%
definition of the population	18.4%
how sample was chosen	0.0%
sample size	0.02%
response or completion rate	0.0%
sampling error/interpretation	0.02%
weighting	0.0%
results on subsamples	0.10%
time, location, or method	0.08%

In the 30 one-hour segments of *The Situation Room*, there were 49 polls or surveys mentioned. 57% of the time, the conductor or the sponsor was mentioned. The complete question wording was offered only 12.2% of the time. The population was defined in 18.4% of the time; but how the sample was chosen from the population was never mentioned. In their 49 references to polls, only once was sample size included. Response rate or completion rates were never offered and only once was sampling error mentioned or at least alluded to. Any information about time, location, or the method of the survey was included in less than 1% of their stories including polls. Table 3.3 above summarizes my findings from the content analysis of how CNN's *The Situation Room* reports polls and surveys.

The Situation Room also made several references to polls and survey in passing. Of the 49 times a poll or survey was mentioned in the 30 stories in my sample, 12 of the references to polls or surveys were only in passing. About 25% of the time then, *The Situation Room* included only a casual reference to a poll or survey. Table 3.4 below summarizes conformity to AAPOR standards for those references to polls or surveys that were not simply in passing. My overall conclusion about how CNN's *The Situation Room* covers polls and surveys is that despite the fact that there is more broadcast time to cover more details about polls, conformity to AAPOR standards is still low.

Table 3.4. Conformity to AAPOR Standards by CNN's *The Situation Room*, (excluding stories with passing reference to polls)

	percentage
conductor and/or sponsor	75.7%
question wording	16.2%
definition of the population	24.3%
how sample was chosen	0.0%
sample size	.027%
response or completion rate	0.0%
sampling error/interpretation	.027%
weighting	0.0%
results on subsamples	.135%
time, location, or method	.080%

Chapter Summary and Discussion

I found support for all of my hypotheses in this chapter. Based upon my examination of how polls are reported in the *New York Times*, the *NBC Nightly News*, and CNN's *The Situation Room*, I found that television news and newspaper reports about polls do not conform well to AAPOR minimum standards for disclosure. I also found that television news reports about polls include less methodological information

than do newspaper reports about polls. I found that in its reports about polls, the *New York Times* conformed better to AAPOR standards in reporting poll conductor or sponsor, question wording, definition of the population, how the sample was chosen, sample size, and the time, location, and method of the survey than did the *NBC Nightly News*. But overall, the *Times* conformity to the AAPOR standards was still not good.

The *Times* conformed to the conductor or sponsor standards about 83% of the time and to the definition of the population standard standards less than 50% of the time. However, it conformed to every other standard less than 25% of the time. The *NBC Nightly News* conformed to the conductor and sponsor standards about 62% of the time. But it conformed to every other standard less than one percent of the time! Cable news, despite its greater amount of broadcast time, does not conform well to the AAPOR standards either. *The Situation Room* conformed to the AAPOR standard of including who conducted or sponsored the poll about 75% of the time, to the definition of the population standard about 24% of the time, to the question wording standard about 16% of the time, and to every other standard less than 1% of the time.

The low conformity to AAPOR minimum standards for disclosure might help explain why many citizens are skeptical of public opinion polls. Most citizens are exposed to polls and surveys in the news media; if the media does not do a good job at explaining the details about the polls they include in their stories, citizens' knowledge about polls and polling methodology will not improve. They will also have a difficult time distinguishing between scientific and unscientific polls. One consequence of this is

that people might use information they might not deem credible if they understood it better to make political decisions.

Future research into how the media reports polls and surveys should examine how they frame polls. In other words, do they use the terms “scientific” or “unscientific” when referring to a poll or survey? Do they use the term “random” and do they explain what this means? If people do not understand how or do not believe that using a random sample to generalize to a population is a legitimate way to gauge public opinion, then these various frames will likely affect the credibility that people assign to a poll they encounter. Therefore, using these frames might affect how different people perceive the same information. I found an example of this in my content analysis that really illustrates this point well. In a story about Condoleezza Rice’s popularity, CNN correspondent Mary Snow gave this report to *The Situation Room*’s anchorperson Wolf Blitzer:

Well Wolf, whether it’s an address to religious leaders with political muscle or a random survey, the Secretary of State is proving that she has followers. [voice over video] She may rank number one in talk shows and she may grace mountains of magazine covers, but when it comes to picking a dinner guest, men over 25 pick Condoleezza Rice as their top choice in an unscientific poll by Esquire magazine. Rice outranked both Oprah Winfrey and Angelina Jolie. It speaks to Rice’s popularity at a time when President Bush’s poll numbers have been low (*The Situation Room*, June 14, 2006).

Snow’s use of the word “random” might conjure up a number of images in viewer’s minds. Some might hear the word “random” and think “haphazard” or some process that has no order. They might perceive this poll to be sloppy or useless. They might believe “Oh, it’s so random-it doesn’t mean anything.” Ironically, they are right about this particular poll. But others might hear the word “random” to describe a survey and think about random selection of respondents. They might perceive the poll as more

accurate since its sample was chosen using scientific survey methodology-using probability theory as a guide. It turns out that in this case, that the sample was not selected based on scientific survey standards.

In fact, Snow explicitly describes the survey as “unscientific.” The men over the age of 25 clearly selected themselves for this survey. Not only can the results not be generalized to the nation’s population, they cannot even be generalized to the population of men over the age of 25. Yet Snow reports the results as a testimony to Rice’s popularity while Bush’s popularity is declining (although no evidence of this is offered). For the viewer, there are a number of consequences. First, they might believe that Rice’s popularity is not suffering at the same time as is the president’s. They might also believe that Rice is quite popular among men over the age of 25. But in my opinion, the real concern we should have is that some viewers might equate “random surveys” with “unscientific” surveys. When they are exposed to surveys that are described as using a “random sample,” they might believe that these too are “unscientific.” Because of the careless way this poll was framed, viewers might have completely different perceptions of it and of even more polls they are exposed to in the future. So we should be concerned with how well the media conforms to AAPOR guidelines and with how they frame the polls they include in their stories.

Overall, it is clear though that the news media needs to do more to conform to AAPOR standards. For citizens to have a better understanding of polls and for them to be able to better judge the credibility of those reported in the media, it is important for the media to provide citizens with this information. Citizens rely on the media to explain

polling information to them and “public misunderstanding of opinion surveys can be expected to continue as long as the mass media ignore or belittle their technical intricacies” (Bogart, 1973: 23).

While conformity to the AAPOR minimum standards is low for all three of the sources in this study, conformity was much higher for the *New York Times*. In the next chapter, I examine how people perceive polling methodology, specifically scientific polling methodology. If newspapers do a better job of disclosing the technical details about the polls they include in their stories, will newspaper readers be more accepting of scientific survey methodology? I analyze how newspaper exposure and television news exposure affect an individual’s belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

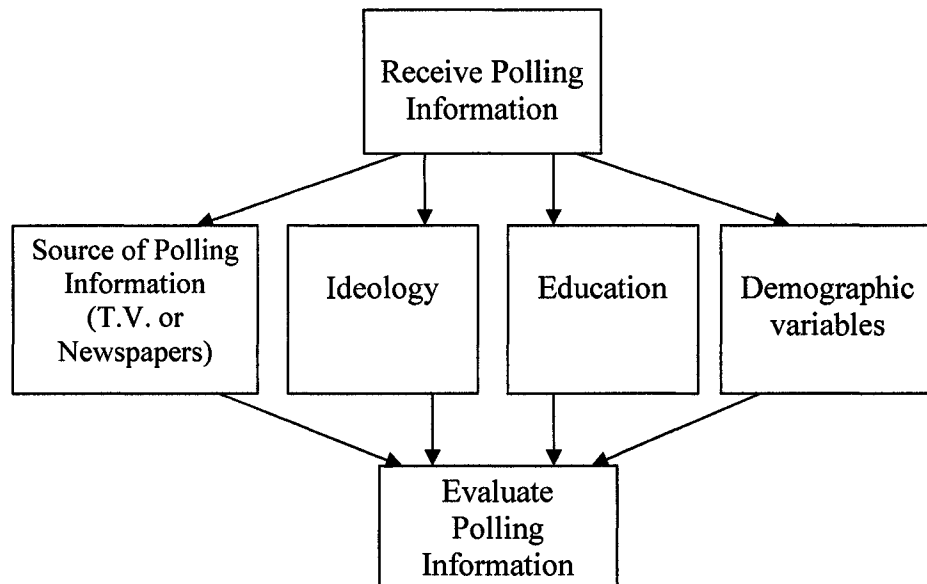
Public Perceptions of the “Science” of Polls: Individual Characteristics That Affect Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology

As I discussed in chapter two, citizens evaluate the polling information they receive, including the methodological information included in reports about polls. This chapter is focused on offering a better understanding of the link between reception of this polling information, specifically scientific polling methodology, and evaluation of that information. One way that people judge the credibility of polling information is by evaluating polling methodology. Some people are more willing to believe that scientific polls are valid ways of measuring public opinion. I am interested in which factors affect an individual's belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology in order to have a better understanding of who might find scientific polls more credible.

The media source from which people receive polling information is an important determinant of their evaluation of scientific polling methodology. The previous chapter offered evidence of the differences in type and amount of information about polling methodology included in reports about polls in the newspaper and in television news. Television news reports about polls contain less methodological information than do newspaper reports about polls. Therefore, television news viewers and newspaper readers might have different evaluations of scientific polling methodology. Television news viewers might be less willing to believe that polls using scientific survey methodology are valid ways of measuring public opinion because they have less exposure to it.

In addition, an individual's education and ideology might affect his or her evaluations of polling information reported in the media. Whether people find information to be credible depends in part upon their perception that the source is not biased against their interests. I expect that ideology then plays a big role here. Conservatives might perceive that the media has a liberal bias, and therefore the polls reported in the media are biased too. I predict that conservatives will be less likely to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology because of their perception that the media is injecting a liberal bias into the polls.

Figure 4.1. Citizens' Evaluations of Scientific Polling Methodology



Furthermore, citizens with higher levels of education may simply have more exposure to scientific polling methodology and more exposure to probability sampling or other statistical training. Therefore, they might be more willing to believe that scientific polls are a valid way to measure public opinion. I hypothesize that citizens' evaluations of polling information, specifically their evaluations of scientific polling methodology

depend upon their source of polling information, their ideology, their education, and several demographic variables known to affect political and social evaluations as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Variations in citizens' perceptions of the validity of scientific polling methodology are in some part due to the differences in methodological information included in media reports about polls. In general, there is insufficient methodological information and interpretation included in media reports about polls. As I discussed in chapter one, and confirmed in chapter three, there is a lack of methodological information in media reports of polls (Cantril, 1991; Herbst, 1993) and that many members of the media are not well-trained enough to interpret survey results thus resulting in a great deal of uncritical reporting of public opinion data (Roper, 1983; Elving, 1989; Herbst, 1993).

It is clear that individuals who watch television news or who read the newspaper will likely encounter survey and poll results. And while scholars have noted that the media in general includes limited methodological information in stories about polls, reports about polls in television news programs include considerably less methodological information and accurate interpretation of polls. In fact, Weiss and Singer (1988: 234) found that "31 percent of focus newspaper stories about surveys, 25 percent of those in newsmagazines, and none of those reported on television" in 1982 included interpretation or analysis. Recall from the previous chapter that Paletz, et al. (1980: 505) found that sample size was given in 67% of *New York Times* stories and in 26% in television (CBS and NBC evening news) news stories. Further, Larson (2003) found that although

information about sampling error in reports about polls in television news stories were increasing, sampling error was often misinterpreted in these television news reports.

Recall from chapter three that I found similar results in my analysis of television news and newspaper reports about polls. Therefore, individuals who rely on television news are exposed to less scientific polling methodology and interpretation of poll results than those who read the newspaper. We should expect those individuals who watch television news to be less familiar with scientific polling methodology and therefore less likely to believe that using it is a valid way of measuring public opinion. We might also expect that individuals who read the newspaper, because they are exposed to it more often, are more likely to believe that using scientific polling methodology is a valid way to measure public opinion.

Furthermore, an individual's perception of their source of the polling information might affect his or her belief that scientific polling methodology is a valid way of measuring public opinion. The mainstream press is often criticized as having a "liberal bias." In a recent study, Pew found that 53% of Americans believe that news organizations are politically biased and twice as many say news organizations are "liberal" (51%) than "conservative" (26%), while 14% say neither phrase applies (July 13, 2003). Further, 61% Republicans, 42% of Democrats, and 40% of Independents think the press is politically biased (Pew, Nov. 28, 2001). Conservatives may see scientific polls as another way of injecting the liberal bias. Therefore, ideological conservatives may resist messages from what they perceive as the "liberal media," including poll results (Barone, 1997; Safire, 1997). Even well-educated conservatives

may simply not believe that a random sample of 1500-2000 people can accurately reflect the views of the nation.

In addition to ideology and source of news, we should expect an individual's education to affect his or her belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology. An individual who has a higher level of education might be better able to understand polling methodology reported in the news and therefore more likely to perceive scientific polling methodology as a legitimate way to measure public opinion. To examine these ideas further, I test the following hypotheses in this chapter:

H4A: Ideological conservatives are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

H4B: Individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

H4C: Individuals who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

H4D: Individuals who obtain their news from television news programs are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation, *ceteris paribus*.

In the following section, I discuss the measurement of the variables used to test these four hypotheses.

Data and Measurement

The data used to test these hypotheses were obtained from a Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey for which results were released on March 27, 1998 and entitled "Conservative Opinions Not Underestimated, but Racial Hostility Missed." The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for Pew.

Respondents were chosen through a random-digit-dial procedure among the continental United States. Pew utilizes a procedure to ensure that “the number of telephone numbers randomly sampled from within a given county is proportional to that county’s share of telephone numbers in the U.S.” (Pew, 1998a: 1). To obtain these data, Pew conducted two surveys, one defined as “standard” and another described as “rigorous.” A description of the differences between the two surveys is included in the Appendix.

The response rates for the two surveys differed, but there were few demographic or substantive differences in the results. For the standard survey, the overall response rate was 42%, whereas the overall response rate for the rigorous survey sample was 71%. In fact, one of the goals of the original Pew study was to show that although standard surveys have low response rates, these survey respondents are not very different from those who are missed by these surveys. Pew found that the standard and rigorous surveys “produced strikingly similar results” (1998b: 2). Pew found that only on five of the questions were there statistically significant differences between the two surveys (1998b: 2).

The total number of completed interviews for the standard survey was 1000. For the rigorous survey, 1201 interviews were completed. The margin of error for each of the two surveys was 4% (Pew, 1998b: 3). In the dataset I obtained from Pew, the samples of the two surveys are combined ($n = 2201$). Given that there were no statistically significant differences between the two samples on any of the variables I used in my analysis, using the pooled data is appropriate.

Measurement of Variables

The dependent variable in this chapter, Random Sample was conceptualized as a respondent's belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology. It was operationalized by asking respondents Q.37 "Do you think that a random sample of 1,500 or 2,000 people can accurately reflect the views of the nation's population, or not?" 29% of the sample said it can accurately reflect the views of the nation's population. 66% said it cannot accurately reflect the views of the nation's population. 5% answered "don't know" or refused to answer.

I analyzed the effect of several independent variables upon an individual's belief in the validity of scientific survey methodology. First, ideology was conceptualized as political ideology and measured by asking respondents Q.22, "In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" 6.6% identified themselves as "very conservative;" 29.9% identified themselves as "conservative;" 40.8% identified themselves as "moderate;" 14.5% identified themselves as "liberal;" 4.6% identified themselves as "very liberal;" and 3.6% said "don't know" or refused to answer.

Education was conceptualized as level of formal education and measured by asking respondents D.3 "What was the last grade or class that you completed in school?" 9.6% completed less than high school; 30.7% completed high school; 28.8% completed some college; 30.3% completed college or a higher level of education; and .5% of the sample answered "don't know" or refused to answer this question. The median education level for the sample was "some college." Respondents were slightly better educated than

the nation on average. According to the most recent U.S. Census, 19.6% of Americans 25 or older had not completed high school. 24.4% had college degrees or higher level of education.

There were no questions on this survey that asked respondents how often they read the newspaper or watched television news. Therefore, I used two questions that *were* asked of the respondents to serve as proxies for newspaper and television news exposure in my study. To measure exposure to newspapers, I used Q.9 “Did you get a chance to read a daily newspaper yesterday, or not?” 46.7% of the sample said “Yes;” 53.1% of the sample said “No;” and .1% said “don’t know.” To measure exposure to television news, I used Q. 10, “Did you watch the news or a news program on television yesterday, or not?” 64.5% answered “Yes;” 35% answered “no;” and .5% answered “don’t know.”

I also controlled for several demographic variables that might affect an individual’s belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology. Income was measured by asking respondents question D.10, “Last year, that is in 1996, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.” 6.9% said less than \$10,000; 13.2% said between \$10,000 and \$20,000; 14.8% said between \$20,000 and \$30,000; 14.7% said between \$30,000 and \$40,000; 11.1% said between \$40,000 and \$50,000; 15% said between \$50,000 and under \$75,000; 7.1% said between \$75,000 to under \$100,000; 5.6% said \$100,000 or more; and 11.7% said “don’t know” or refused to answer. The median income was between

\$40,000 and \$50,000 per year. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median household income is \$43,318.

Age was measured by asking respondents question D.2 “What is your age?” The mean age was 45 years old. Race was measured by asking question D.5 “What is your race? Are you white, black or some other?” 80.2% self-identified as white; 10.2% self-identified as black or African-American; 2.0% self-identified as Asian; 6.5% self-identified as other or as mixed race; and 1.1% said “don’t know” or refused to answer. In the analysis, race was dummy-coded (white=1). I also controlled for gender in the analysis (male=1). 57.3% of respondents were female and 42.7% were male. Home ownership was measured by asking respondents D.18, “Do you own or rent your own home?” 68.3% of respondents indicated that they owned their own home. 29.9% said that they did not own their home. 1.8% of the respondents said “don’t know” or refused to answer this question. Home ownership was also dummy-coded (own home=1).

Model Estimation

Recall that the dependent variable in this chapter, Random Sample, is whether or not a respondent believes that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 people can accurately reflect the views of the nation’s population. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, I estimated the following model: $\ln \left[\frac{P(\text{Random Sample}_i)}{1-P(\text{Random Sample}_i)} \right] = B_0 + B_1 \text{Ideology}_i + B_2 \text{Education}_i + B_3 \text{Newspaper}_i + B_4 \text{TV News}_i + B_5 \text{Demographic variables}_i + e_i$,

where $\left[\frac{P(\text{Random Sample}_i)}{1-P(\text{Random Sample}_i)} \right]$ is the probability of a respondent believing that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the

nation divided by the probability of a respondent *not* believing that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the nation. This is called the odds-ratio, or the odds in favor of a respondent believing this. The natural log of the odds ratio is the logit. The slope coefficients give the “change in the log of the odds ratio per unit change” in the explanatory variables (Gujarati, 1998: 449). Because these coefficients are not probabilities, the probabilities must be calculated using the following formula based on Gujarati (1998: 451).

$$P(y_i) = \frac{e \{b_0 + b_1 \text{Ideology}_i + b_2 \text{Education}_i + b_3 \text{Newspaper}_i + b_4 \text{TV News}_i\}}{[1 + e \{b_0 + b_1 \text{Ideology}_i + b_2 \text{Education}_i + b_3 \text{Newspaper}_i + b_4 \text{TV News}_i\}]}$$

I estimated the model and then calculated the probabilities in order to determine the effect of each of the independent variables on Random Sample.

Analysis and Results

Estimation of the logit model revealed support for the first hypothesis that ideological conservatives are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation. I also found support for the third hypothesis. Individuals who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation. I did not find support for the other two hypotheses. While the coefficient for televisions news use was in the predicted direction, it was not statistically significant. Education also had no statistically significant effect on whether an individual believes that a random sample of 1500-2000 people can represent the views of the entire nation. Of the control variables, only age had a statistically significant effect. I found that older respondents were slightly

less likely to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology. The logit estimation is summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Individual Characteristics That Affect Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology

variable	B	se	Wald	sig.
Constant	-.198	.254	.606	.436
Ideology	-.125	.050	6.272	.012
Education	.008	.052	.023	.880
Newspaper use	.247	.100	6.077	.014
Television news use	-.038	.101	.145	.703
Income	-.021	.028	.577	.447
Age	-.006	.003	3.046	.081
Race	.048	.122	.156	.693
Gender	.051	.095	.292	.589
Home ownership	-.050	.113	.199	.655

The dependent variable, Random Sample, is dichotomous (1=yes, 0=no) and measured by asking respondents Q.37 "Do you think that a random sample of 1,500 or 2,000 people can accurately reflect the views of the nation's population, or not?"

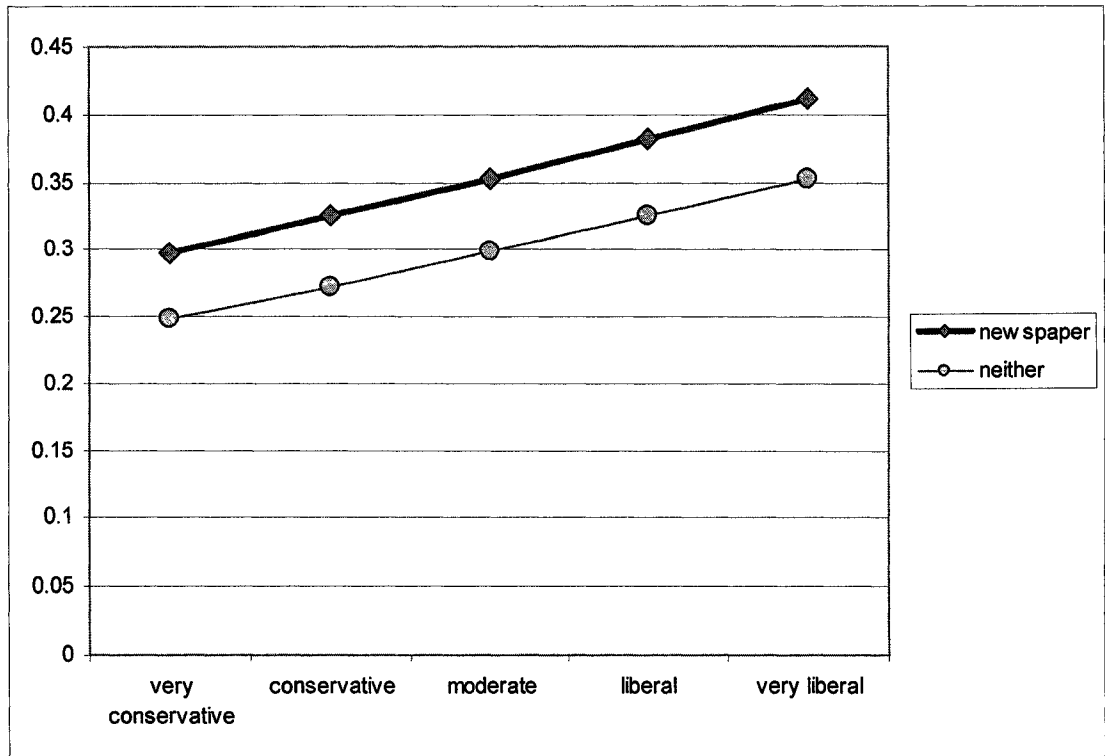
N=2208

Chi-square=16.710, df=9, p<.053

Cox and Snell $R^2 = .008$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .011$

Logit slope coefficients are not easy to interpret. Therefore, I calculated the probabilities associated with the coefficients. A summary of the probabilities is included in the Appendix. I calculated the probabilities for each ideological category and with newspaper use only and with neither newspaper nor television use. I did not calculate probabilities with television news use because it was not statistically significant and therefore not useful in comparing individuals' beliefs about scientific survey methodology. I held education at the median education level for the sample (some college). I held age at the mean (45 years old). Race was held at 1 (white) and gender at 1 (male). I also held home ownership at 1 (yes). Figure 4.2 below offers a summary of the associated probabilities.

Figure 4.2. Ideology, Newspaper Use, and Belief in the Validity of Scientific Survey Methodology



From Figure 4.2, it is clear that the combined effect of newspaper consumption and ideology is the strongest predictor of whether a respondent believes that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 people can reflect the views of the whole nation. More conservative ideology is associated with a decrease in the probability of believing that a random sample can represent the population.

I believe that the results for newspaper use would have been even stronger if it was measured differently. Newspaper use and television news use were measured by asking respondents whether they read a newspaper or watched television news yesterday. A more accurate measure of newspaper and television news use would ask respondents how often they participated in each. I believe that the way these variables were measured

helps to explain the lack of support for hypothesis four. If television news use was measured differently, I might find statistically significant evidence in support of the hypothesis that individuals who obtain their news from television news programs are less likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 can accurately reflect the views of the whole nation.

Overall though, these results offer us a better understanding of how ideology and news source affect an individual's perception of polling information, specifically of scientific polling methodology. Looking at the difference between very conservative respondents who do not read the newspaper nor watch television news and very liberal respondents who read the newspaper only, we find that the latter are 16.3% more likely than the former to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology.

Conservatives, because they perceive the news as biased against them, are less willing to believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology information that is presented in the media. But individuals who read the newspaper are more familiar with scientific polling methodology because there is more methodological information presented in reports about polls in the newspaper than in television news. Therefore, these people are more willing to believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology.

While I found support for hypotheses 1 and 3, we should view these results with some caution. Given that there is likely a relationship between education and news consumption and between newspaper and television news consumption, multicollinearity could be a problem. Respondents who read the newspaper may also watch the news on television. Further, respondents with higher levels of education are likely to consume

more news in general. Therefore, I performed diagnostic tests for multicollinearity. According to Gujarati (1999), there are several methods for detecting multicollinearity. One such method is by performing auxiliary regressions. “[O]ne way of finding out which X variable is highly collinear with other X variables in the model is regress each X variable on the remaining X variables and to compute the corresponding R^2 ” (Gujarati, 1999: 323). I performed each of the auxiliary regressions and STATA computed R^2 for each regression. I then tested the statistical significance of the R^2 from each of the auxiliary regressions using an F-test. From Gujarati (1999: 324), $F = [R^2/(k-1)]/[(1-R^2)/(n-k)]$, where n is the number of observations and k is the number of explanatory variables including the intercept. The null hypothesis is $R^2 = 0$. Table 4.7 summarizes the results of significance tests of R^2 in each auxiliary regression. The results of the individual regressions are included the Appendix.

Table 4.2. Significance of R^2 in Auxiliary Regressions

auxiliary regression dependent variable	Value of R^2	Value of F	Is F significant?
ideology	.004	2.37	Yes
education	.029	25.87	Yes
newspaper	.051	46.55	Yes
television news	.036	32.35	Yes

R^2 in each of the auxiliary regressions was significant, indicating that multicollinearity is a problem. Gujarati (1999) explains that except in the case of perfect multicollinearity, multicollinearity does not mean that the estimators are biased or inefficient. He further explains that multicollinearity may result in a high R^2 and few significant coefficients. However, in my main model, R^2 is not high (.008). He suggests

that one possible method for correcting for multicollinearity is to drop the variable causing the multicollinearity from the model. I cannot drop ideology from the model, despite its collinearity with the other three explanatory variables because it is one of the main explanatory variables of interest in this model. Dropping it from the model would result in specification error (Gujarati, 1999: 331). Instead, I estimated the model after dropping television news from the model. I found that the coefficients were nearly identical to those in the model that includes television news. Therefore, I concluded that omitting television news really does not help “correct” for multicollinearity.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, I found two important characteristics affected whether an individual believes in the validity of scientific survey methodology. I found that individuals who are more liberal and who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000 people can accurately reflect the views of the nation’s population. More conservative individuals were less likely to believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology. There are several implications of these findings. First, given that the source of a poll and an individual’s ideology affects his or her perception of scientific polling methodology, we might expect then that some people will not accept scientific polls as accurate reflections of public opinion. We should expect that conservatives and people who do not read the newspaper are not likely going to be persuaded by polls using scientific polling methodology. These people are not likely to believe that scientific poll results are useful to them when forming their own

political judgments. They are also less likely to believe that government should pay attention to polls using scientific polling methodology.

Another important question remains however. If some citizens believe that polls using scientific survey methodology are not valid ways of measuring public opinion, are they more likely to believe that call-in or other self-selection polls can accurately reflect the views of the larger population? While I cannot test this proposition with the data I have, it is an interesting research question that should be answered. Are conservatives and people who do not read the newspaper more likely to be persuaded by unscientific polls? This is one area where understanding how framing polls may affect how citizens perceive them. If an individual believes that using an unscientific poll is a more valid way to measure public opinion, simply framing a poll as “unscientific” or “here’s what people like you thought” might make them more willing to accept the polling information as accurate. They might be more willing to incorporate it into their own political judgments and want the government to pay attention to it as well. If this is the case, do these unscientific polls create the potential for manipulation of public opinion? This is an important area of research that deserves further attention.

Moreover, since liberals and people who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that polls using scientific polling methodology are valid ways of measuring public opinion, they are more likely to be persuaded by scientific polls. Obviously the persuasiveness of scientific polls also depends on question wording, question ordering, and other methodological concerns we might have about polls. However, one implication of these findings is that because some people are more likely to believe in the “science”

of polls, they may be more willing to incorporate polling information from scientific polls into their own political decision making process. They might also believe that government should pay attention to scientific polls when making decisions for the nation. Because these people believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology, they might be more skeptical of unscientific polls. They might not be persuaded by these call-in and other self-selection polls. Therefore, framing these polls as “unscientific” might result in their ignoring the information contained in the poll results. They might be less susceptible to manipulation through the use of bogus polls. Again, this should be examined in future research.

Importantly for this project however is that we know that some people simply do not believe that scientific polls are a valid way of measuring public opinion. We can deduce that they are likely to reject scientific polling information as an inaccurate reflection of public opinion and thus it will not enter into their political thinking. For those who do believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology, we should not automatically assume that they will use information from scientific polls. They are just much more likely to than people who reject scientific polling methodology. In the chapters that follow, I discuss what additional factors affect an individual’s use of polls as well as whether he or she thinks government should pay attention to polls.

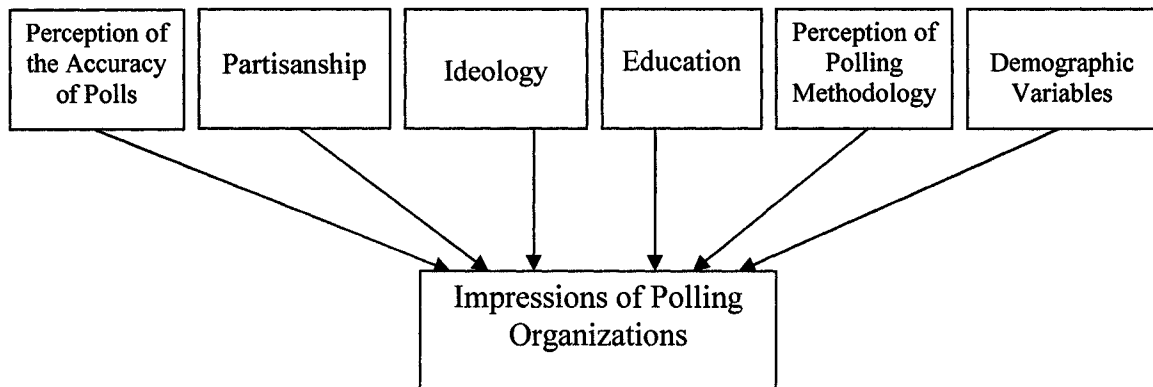
Chapter V

Impressions of Polls: How Do Citizens Perceive Particular Polls and Polling Organizations?

In this chapter, I examine some of the differences in citizens' perceptions of polls conducted by or commissioned by different organizations and groups. In general, I believe that people do not view all polls equally. They have more favorable impressions of some polls and less favorable impressions of others. As I discussed in chapter two, the impressions that people have of polling organizations and polls affects whether they pay attention to polls or believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. In short, citizens' use of polls in their own political thinking depends on their perception of the credibility of polls. Recall from chapter two that whether citizens perceive a source as credible depends on whether they perceive the source to be knowledgeable and whether they perceive that the source has interests in common with them. I presume that citizens' evaluations of particular types of polls and polling organizations are based upon whether they perceive the polling organizations to be knowledgeable about how to accurately conduct polls and whether the polling organizations are biased against their interests.

In this chapter, I examine the factors that explain the variations in citizens' impressions of specific types of polls and polling organizations. Recall from chapter two my model of what affects variations in citizens' impressions of polls and polling organizations.

Figure 5.1. What Affects Citizens' Impressions of Polls and Polling Organizations?



Hypotheses

First, before citizens decide to pay attention to poll results when forming political judgments, they make some evaluations of polling organizations. These evaluations are also important to their belief that government should pay attention to polls. Citizens evaluate the knowledge and potential bias of polling organizations and they do not view all polls equally. One common citizen critique of polls is that poll results reported in the media can be “twisted” to say what the pollsters or media want. Therefore, whether people perceive polls to be accurate might explain whether they have favorable impressions of them. I expect that individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion will have favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations in general. The first hypothesis I test in this chapter is that

H5A: Individuals who perceive polls in general as accurate reflections of public opinion have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, media polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, polls commissioned by political parties, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

Whether citizens perceive polls as credible depends in part upon their perception that they are not biased against their interests. For instance, conservatives, because they perceive that the media as hostile to their own beliefs, might perceive poll results reported in the media as biased and therefore we should expect that conservatives have unfavorable impressions of media polls. Moreover, we might expect that Democrats and Republicans have different impressions of media polls as well. Because Republicans are more likely to see the media as biased against their beliefs, they might have less favorable impressions of media polls. In fact, the mainstream press is often criticized as having a “liberal bias.” In a recent study, Pew found that 53% of Americans believe that news organizations are politically biased and twice as many say news organizations are “liberal” (51%) than “conservative” (26%), while 14% say neither phrase applies (July 13, 2003). Further, 61% Republicans, compared to 42% of Democrats and 40% of Independents, think the press is politically biased (Pew, Nov. 28, 2001). Because more Republicans perceive the media as biased against them, it is plausible that they view media polls more negatively.

In addition, I posit that Democrats and Republicans have more favorable impressions of polls commissioned by political parties because they would perceive parties in general as having interests in common with them. For instance, Democrats and Republicans are likely familiar with the benefits of polling to political parties. Parties use polls to raise money, to “analyze the effectiveness of advertising, to estimate the impact of party initiatives, and to help them decide how to spend funds” (Herbst, 1993: 119). Parties also provide poll results to political candidate in order for them to more

effectively plan their strategies (Herbst, 1993: 118). Others have found that polls help candidates plan campaign strategies (Lavrakas and Traugott, 2000; Meyer, 1989). Herbst (1993) finds that surveys and polls are also useful to political consultants in helping to plan campaign strategies. Parties also conduct polls to assess public attitudes on issues and to discern candidate popularity (Herbst, 1993: 120). In this chapter I test several hypotheses about the relationships between partisanship and impressions of polls and ideology and impressions of polls.

H5B: Republicans have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

H5C: Democrats and Republicans have more favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties, *ceteris paribus*.

H5D: Conservatives have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

In addition, citizens' perceptions of the knowledge that polling organizations have about modern polling practices also affect how they perceive the polling organizations and the polls they conduct. For one, we might expect that more educated people have a better understanding of scientific polling methodology because they have been more likely exposed to some statistical or other mathematical training that would make them better able to discriminate between polling methods based on sound scientific practices and those not based upon sound scientific practices. Furthermore, better educated individuals likely have more favorable impressions of polls conducted by academic research centers because if they have even a partial college education, they will have more familiarity with universities and other academic research centers and therefore find them as more credible. They will be likely to perceive those who conduct academic

research polls as more knowledgeable of polling methods and about the issues and subjects motivating the polls.

Furthermore, previous work has consistently shown that more educated people are more involved in politics (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1996). Perhaps more among the more educated, there is a general distrust of polls commissioned by organizations that ostensibly have a political agenda, such as those conducted by political parties. Furthermore, people with higher levels of education might be more skeptical of polling information presented in media reports because of the paucity of methodological information included in such reports. They might also be more aware of the lack of methodological training of many members of the media. I test two hypotheses about the relationship between education and impressions of polls in this chapter.

H5E: More educated individuals have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

H5F: More educated individuals have less favorable impressions of media polls and polls conducted by political parties, *ceteris paribus*.

Other people may have a more specialized understanding of polling methodology which results in their having more favorable impressions of particular polls. For one, people who have a better understanding of or who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology will be more likely to discriminate between these five polling organizations in that they will have more favorable impressions of polling organizations that have reputations for relying upon scientific polling practices. I use two measures of perceptions of scientific polling methodology in this chapter. First, I use the same

measure as in chapter four, whether an individual believes that a random sample of a sufficient size can accurately reflect the views of the nation's population which I conceptualize as their belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology. I also use another measure of their perception of scientific polling methodology, specifically whether they think that there is an important distinction between scientific and unscientific polls. I expect that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology and those who think that there is an important difference between telephone polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples will have more favorable impressions of polling organizations with reputations of conducting scientific polls.

In addition, I expect that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology and individuals who believe that there is an important difference between scientific and unscientific polls do not have favorable impressions of media polls. As I discussed previously in chapters one and three, reports about polls in the media include little methodological information. While more methodological information is included in polls reported in the newspaper, the Kaiser data I use to test these relationships does not ask respondents to distinguish between television news and newspaper polls. But I believe that individuals who understand the importance of scientific polling methodology will have less favorable impressions of media polls because of members of the media are not well-trained enough to interpret these polls. While media polls have improved over time, and many do have strong reputations, especially those affiliated with major polling organizations, such as Gallup, I think that

for many people, media polls might still represent lower-quality polling. I test several hypotheses about individuals' perceptions of polling methodology and their impressions of polling organizations in this chapter.

H5G: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have less favorable impressions of media polls, *ceteris paribus*.

H5H: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

H5I: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random and nonrandom samples have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by media, *ceteris paribus*.

H5J: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, *ceteris paribus*.

Data and Measurement

I tested these hypotheses using data I obtained from the Roper Center for Public Opinion. The data was collected from a survey sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation in collaboration with Public Perspective magazine. The survey entitled "Polling and Democracy" was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from January 3-March 26, 2001. The sample size for the Kaiser survey was 1,206. The Kaiser survey was conducted to examine how people perceive, use, and expect public officials to use public opinion polls (Brodie, et al., 2001).

The dependent variables in this chapter are the respondents' overall impressions of five types of polls: media polls, academic research center polls, those commissioned

by nonprofit organizations and foundations, those conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, and those commissioned by political parties. I measured these variables by recoding responses to Q43. in the Kaiser survey, so higher numbers reflected more favorable ratings. Table 5.1 below summarizes the frequencies for each.

Table 5.1. Frequency Distribution of Favorability Ratings of Polls

polling conducted or commissioned by	very favorable	somewhat favorable	not too favorable	not at all favorable
polling organizations	137 (18.6%)	430 (58.3%)	114 (15.4%)	57 (7.7%)
media	126 (13.3%)	516 (54.4%)	191 (20.1%)	116 (12.2%)
academic research centers	244 (29.1%)	481 (57.3%)	73 (8.7%)	41 (4.9%)
nonprofit and foundation	320 (33.2%)	533 (55.3%)	70 (7.3%)	40 (4.2%)
political parties	51 (5.6%)	313 (34.1%)	326 (35.5%)	228 (24.8%)

- Q43. What is your overall impression of (Insert)? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say? [Order items randomly]
- polling organizations, such as Gallup or Harris
 - polls by media organizations, such as the CBS-New York Times poll or the Newsweek poll
 - polls by academic research centers at universities, such as the University of Chicago or University of Michigan
 - polls commissioned by nonprofit and foundation groups, like the American Cancer Society or the Red Cross
 - polls commissioned by political parties, such as the Republican or Democratic National Committee

The first hypothesis I test in this chapter is citizens who perceive polls as generally accurate reflections of public opinion are likely to view all of these five types of polls more favorably. To measure respondents' belief that polls are accurate, I used Q31. in the Kaiser survey. "In your opinion, how often do public opinion polls accurately reflect what the public thinks? Just about always, most of the time, only some

of the time or hardly ever?” 5.1% responded “just about always.” 29.1% responded “most of the time.” 55.3% answered “only some of the time.” And 10.5% responded “hardly ever.”

I also predict that partisanship and ideology help to explain citizens’ perceptions of particular types of polls. I conceptualized partisanship as identification with one of the two major political parties. To measure partisanship, I recoded responses to D3. “In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an independent or something else?” I created two dummy variables “Republican” and “Democrat.” 29.6% of the sample identified as Republican and 33.3% identified as Democrat. Ideology was measured by asking respondents question D4. “Would you describe your political beliefs as conservative, moderate, or liberal?” 29.6% of the sample identified as conservative. 33.3% of the sample said that they were moderate. 21.7% identified as liberal. In the analysis, I recoded the responses to D4. so that higher numbers reflected more conservative ideology.

Education was measured by asking respondents question D7. “What was the last grade or class that you completed in school?” 8.4% of the sample said that they had completed less than high school. 31.3% said that they had completed high school or the equivalent. 24.5% said that they had completed some college, including business, technical, or vocational training. 19.0% of the respondents were college graduates. 15.5% had completed some post-graduate training or professional schooling after college. The median education was “some college.” Respondents were slightly better educated than the nation on average. According to the most recent U.S. Census, 19.6% of

Americans 25 or older had not completed high school. 24.4% had college degrees or higher level of education.

There are two independent variables that measure respondents' perceptions of scientific polling methodology. The first, whether the respondent thought that there was an important difference between a telephone poll conducted using a random sample and one where people self-select themselves by calling a 1-800 number, was measured using Q44. in the Kaiser survey. "Suppose for a minute that you just heard about two polls on the same issue. If you learned that [one poll selected people to be interviewed by randomly calling telephone numbers, while people took the other survey by calling an 800 number advertised on TV], would you consider this a very important difference that makes one poll better than the other, somewhat important, not too important or not at all an important difference that makes one poll better than the other?" 38.1% of respondents said it was a "very important difference." 31.0% said it was a "somewhat important" difference. 13.5% said it was a "not too important difference". 12.5% said it was "not at all an important difference." 4.8% said "don't know" or refused to answer and were coded as "missing."

I conceptualized belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology as a respondent's belief that a randomly selected sample of a sufficient size could represent the views of the entire nation. Respondents were asked Q34. "Most polls interview a random selection of 1000 people. Those who conduct surveys say that if these people are drawn at random and certain procedures are followed carefully, the results obtained from interviewing 1000 people will be pretty close to what you would get if you were able to

interview the entire country. How much confidence do you have that this is right? Are you very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not at all confident?" 6.4% said "very confident." 42.0% said "somewhat confident." 31.9% said "not too confident." 18.3% said "not at all confident." 1.3% said "don't know" or they refused to answer and were coded as "missing."

In the analysis, I controlled for several demographic variables, age, gender, income, and race, found to affect citizens' evaluations of political institutions as well as their political behavior. Age was measured by asking respondents question D2. "What is your age?" The mean age of the sample was 44.6 years old. 46.8% of the sample was male and 53.2% was female. Females were slightly overrepresented in the sample; according to the U.S. Census, 50.8% of the nation is female. Income was measured by asking respondents question D8. "Last year, what was your total household income from all sources before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category." 4.9% said less than \$10,000 per year. 10.9% said between \$10,000 to under \$20,000. 11.9% said \$20,000 to under \$30,000. 12.6% said \$30,000 to under \$40,000. 10.6% said \$40,000 to under \$50,000. 14.8% said \$50,000 to under \$75,000. 9.2% said \$75,000 to under \$100,000. 10.5% said \$100,000 or more. 14.6% said "don't know" or refused to answer and were coded as "missing." The median income was \$40,000 to under \$50,000. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median household income is \$43, 318.

I also controlled for race which was measured in the Kaiser survey using question D6. "What is your race?" If respondents had answered previously that they were of Latino or Hispanic origin, they were also asked in question D6. "Are you white Latino,

black Latino, or some other race?” All other respondents were asked “Are you white, African-American or black, Asian, or some other race?” 77.4% of the respondents were white or white Latino. 9.5% were black or black Latino. 6.0% were Asian and 5.6% said that they were some other race. According to recent estimates, 12.5% of Americans are Latino or Hispanic. 75.1% are white; 12.3% are black or African-American; 3.6% are Asian (Grieco and Cassidy, 2000). I dummy coded race as white for the analysis.

Analysis and Results

I tested each of the hypotheses using OLS. I estimated the following model:

$$\text{Impression of poll}_i = B_0 + B_1 \text{ perceived accuracy of polls}_i + B_2 \text{ partisanship}_i + B_3 \text{ ideology}_i + B_4 \text{ education}_i + B_5 \text{ perception of polling methodology}_i + B_6 \text{ demographic variables}_i + e_i$$
 Tables 5.2-Table 5.6 summarize the regression results.

Table 5.2. Impressions of Media Polls

	B	se	P <
constant	2.646	.190	.000
polls accurate	.324	.063	.000
age	-.005	.002	.011
education	-.005	.027	.860
gender	-.142	.058	.014
income	-.022	.015	.164
race	-.160	.077	.039
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	.027	.030	.374
Democrat	.103	.061	.093
random sample	.248	.036	.000
ideology	-.117	.037	.002

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls by media organizations, such as the CBS-New York Times poll or the Newsweek poll? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

R² = .210

n = 683

Table 5.3. Impressions of Academic Research Centers' Polls

	B	se	P <
constant	2.275	.190	.000
polls accurate	.226	.059	.000
age	-.004	.002	.013
education	.092	.026	.000
gender	-.004	.055	.944
income	.009	.015	.534
race	.058	.075	.440
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	.054	.029	.063
Democrat	.147	.059	.013
random sample	.206	.034	.000
ideology	-.076	.035	.032

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls by academic research centers at universities, such as the University of Chicago or University of Michigan? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

$R^2 = .175$

n = 611

Table 5.4. Impressions of Nonprofit Organizations' or Foundations' Polls

	B	se	P <
constant	3.102	.175	.000
polls accurate	.159	.058	.006
age	-.004	.002	.021
education	-.032	.025	.199
gender	-.048	.053	.366
income	-.027	.014	.061
race	.034	.071	.631
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	.039	.027	.150
Democrat	.095	.056	.090
random sample	.111	.033	.001
ideology	.005	.034	.889

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls commissioned by nonprofit and foundation groups, like the American Cancer Society or the Red Cross? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

$R^2 = .079$

n = 693

Table 5.5. Impressions of Polling Organizations Such as Gallup or Harris

	B	se	P <
constant	1.363	.214	.000
polls accurate	.299	.067	.000
age	-.001	.002	.641
education	.063	.029	.030
gender	-.026	.061	.677
income	.038	.017	.022
race	.050	.085	.559
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	.091	.032	.005
Democrat	.056	.065	.388
random sample	.265	.038	.000
ideology	.007	.039	.147

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polling organizations, such as Gallup or Harris? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

$R^2 = .208$

$n = 544$

Table 5.6. Impressions of Polls Commissioned by Political Parties

	B	se	P <
constant	2.433	.210	.000
polls accurate	.278	.068	.000
age	-.002	.002	.252
education	-.097	.029	.001
gender	-.108	.063	.088
income	-.034	.017	.045
race	-.430	.085	.000
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	-.020	.033	.539
Democrat	.063	.067	.346
random sample	.170	.039	.000
ideology	.140	.041	.001

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls commissioned by political parties, such as the Republican or Democratic National Committee? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

$R^2 = .171$

$n = 655$

I found support for my first hypothesis, **H5A**: Individuals who perceive polls in general as accurate reflections of public opinion have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, media polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, polls commissioned by political parties, and polling organizations such as Gallup. Individuals who perceive polls as accurate reflections of public opinion have more favorable impressions of media polls ($B = .324, P < .000$), academic research center polls ($B = .226, P < .000$), nonprofit and foundation polls ($B = .159, P < .006$), polling organizations such as Gallup ($B = .299, P < .000$) and polls conducted by political parties ($B = .278, P < .000$).

In Tables 5.2-5.6, Republican is not included because of its high collinearity with ideology (Pearson's $r = .860, P < .000$). Democrat was also correlated with ideology, although not strongly (Pearson's $r = -.097, P < .002$). I am interested in examining how being Republican or Democrat, relative to being independent or another political party, is associated with impressions of media polls and polls conducted by political parties. Therefore, I ran these two regressions again, including both Democrat and Republican as independent variables and not including ideology to avoid the multicollinearity problem. The results are in Tables 5.7 and 5.8.

Table 5.7. Impressions of Media Polls-Ideology Omitted and Republican Included

	B	se	P <
constant	2.302	.164	.000
polls accurate	.318	.061	.000
age	-.004	.002	.033
education	.011	.026	.676
gender	-.122	.055	.027
income	-.028	.015	.062
race	-.131	.074	.077
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	.038	.029	.199
Democrat	.091	.068	.180
random sample	.250	.034	.000
Republican	-.132	.069	.054

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls by media organizations, such as the CBS-New York Times poll or the Newsweek poll? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

$R^2 = .199$

$n = 761$

I found support for **H5B**: Republicans have less favorable impressions of media polls ($B = -.132, P < .054$). I did not find a statistically significant relationship between Democrats and impressions of media polls. The results in Table 5.8 indicate support for **H5C** as well. Not surprisingly, Democrats have more favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties ($B = .206, P < .006$). Republicans also have more favorable impressions of party polls ($B = .267, P < .000$).

In order to test **H5D**: Conservatives have less favorable impressions of media polls I had to turn again to the regression analysis that included ideology as an explanatory variable. Table 5.2 indicated support for **H5D**. Individuals who are more ideologically conservative have less favorable impressions of media polls ($B = -.117, P < .002$).

Table 5.8. Impressions of Polls Commissioned by Political Parties-Ideology Omitted, Republican Included

	B	se	P <
constant	2.489	.184	.000
polls accurate	.270	.066	.000
age	-.002	.002	.223
education	-.100	.028	.000
gender	-.109	.061	.075
income	-.031	.016	.056
race	-.362	.082	.000
importance difference between random/non telephone poll	-.004	.032	.903
Democrat	.206	.075	.006
random sample	.163	.037	.000
Republican	.267	.075	.000

dependent variable is response to Q43. What is your overall impression of polls commissioned by political parties, such as the Republican or Democratic National Committee? Is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, not too favorable, not favorable at all, or don't you know enough to say?

R² = .157

n = 728

I found support, although weak, for **H5E**: More educated individuals have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup. The effect of higher education upon impressions of academic research center polls was positive (B = .092, P < .000). Increased education was also associated with more favorable impressions of polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup (B = .063, P < .030). I found only partial support for **H5F**: More educated individuals have less favorable impressions of media polls and polls conducted by political parties. While the association between higher education and impressions of media polls was negative, it was not statistically significant (B = -.005, P < .860). However, more highly educated individuals do have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties (B = -.097, P < .001).

I found no support for **H5G**: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have less favorable impressions of media polls. In fact, I found that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology actually have more favorable impressions of media polls ($B = .248, P < .000$). Perhaps individuals who believe that polls using scientific methods can represent the views of the nation might have more favorable impressions of newspaper polls given that more methodological details are reported in newspaper reports about polls. I speculate that television news polls not affiliated with major newspapers or polling organizations would not be viewed as positively as newspaper polls given the lack of methodological data reported in television news reports about polls and the poor interpretation of these polls in television news. Recall that in chapter four I found that individuals who read the newspaper were more likely to believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology.

I also found no support for **H5I**: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random and nonrandom samples have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by media. The results in Table 5.2 indicate a negative relationship between the perception that there is an important difference between polls using these different methods of sample selection that makes one poll better than the other and impressions of media polls. But this relationship is not statistically significant. ($B = -.027, P < .374$). It is possible that I found no support for this hypothesis because although an individual might perceive that there is a difference between these two polls that makes one better than the other, this does not necessarily mean that he or she thinks that the telephone poll that is conducted upon a random sample

is better than one conducted upon a sample of respondents who call a 1-800 number. Since we do not know which poll respondents view as the better poll, we cannot really ascertain whether their perception of the polling methodology of either poll affects their perceptions of different types of polls.

Interestingly however, I did find partial support for **H5J**: Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup. I found that they had more favorable impressions of academic research center polls ($B = .054, P < .063$) and of polling organizations such as Gallup ($B = .091, P < .005$). But I found that the perception that these two polling methodologies differ had no statistically significant effect upon impressions of polls conducted by nonprofit organizations or foundations ($B = .091, P < .005$).

Finally, I found support for **H5H**: Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of academic research center polls, polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations, and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup. Individuals who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of academic polls ($B = .206, P < .000$), polls commissioned by nonprofit organizations ($B = .111, P < .001$), and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup or Harris ($B = .265, P < .000$).

I also found that several of the demographic variables affect citizens' perceptions of different polls and polling organizations. First, I found that older individuals have less

favorable impressions of academic research center polls ($B = -.004, P < .013$), of media polls ($B = -.005, P < .011$), and of nonprofit and foundation polls ($B = -.004, P < .021$). I also found that males have less favorable impressions of media polls ($B = -.142, P < .014$) and of polls conducted by political parties ($B = -.108, P < .088$). Further, individuals with higher income have more favorable impressions of polling organizations such as Gallup ($B = .038, P < .022$). But they have less favorable impressions of nonprofit and foundation polls ($B = -.027, P < .061$) and political party polls ($B = -.034, P < .045$). I also found that whites also have less favorable impressions of political party polls ($B = -.430, P < .000$) and of media polls ($B = -.160, P < .039$).

Chapter Summary and Discussion

This preliminary look into how citizens view polls commissioned and conducted by various organizations offers some valuable insight. According to my model of how people perceive public opinion polls, citizens do not view all polling information equally. In fact, their evaluation of polling information is important to their decision to pay attention to it when making political decisions. It is also important to whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the nation. If people do not find polling information to be credible, they will not pay attention to it and they will not expect government to pay attention to it. One of the factors that affects whether citizens pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions and whether they think that the government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation is their impression of polls and polling organizations. In chapter six, I examine the effect that citizens' impressions of

polling organizations have upon their decision to pay attention to polls and their belief that government should pay attention to polls. In this chapter however, I focused on what affects citizens' impressions of polls and polling organizations.

I found that there are several factors that explain variation in citizens' impressions of polls and polling organizations, such as partisanship, ideology, education, the belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology, and the general belief that polls are accurate reflections of mass opinion. For instance, citizens' perceptions that polls are accurate reflections of public opinion translate into their having more favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations. In short, citizens' perceptions that polling information is credible may start with their perception that they are accurate. If individuals who perceive polls as accurate reflections of public opinion have favorable impressions of media and academic polls, those commissioned by political parties or nonprofit groups, and those conducted by polling organizations like Gallup, we might find that these individuals might be equally influenced by all of these types of polls.

However, asking people whether they think polls are accurate reflections of public opinion does not require that they make any specific evaluation of the methodology of polls. As I showed in chapter four, people do vary in their perceptions of scientific polling methodology. In this chapter I showed that their perceptions of scientific polling methodology partially explain citizens' impressions of various polls and polling organizations. I found that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, nonprofit and foundation polls, and polling organizations like Gallup and Harris. This

finding is not surprising because we might expect that people who believe that scientific polling methodology is a valid way of measuring public opinion might view polls with reputations for using scientific polling methodology in a more favorable light.

However, I found surprisingly that people who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of media polls. Given the scarcity of methodological details in media reports about polls, I would expect people who see scientific polling methodology as a valid way of measuring public opinion to view media polls more negatively. The respondents were asked about their impressions of “polls by media organizations, such as the CBS-New York Times poll or the Newsweek poll,” but not how they felt about how polls were reported in the media. It is plausible that people do not view the media polls negatively, but instead the media reports about the polls negatively. As I showed in chapter three though, there are differences in the reporting of polls in the newspaper and on television news. Perhaps individuals who believe that polls using scientific methods can represent the views of the nation might have more favorable impressions of newspaper polls given that more methodological details are reported in newspapers. I speculate that television news polls would not be viewed as positively as newspaper polls. Due to limitations in the data, I cannot test this proposition, but in future research, respondents’ impressions of media reports about polls should be more fully analyzed.

In addition to the effects of their perceptions that scientific polling methodology was a valid way of measuring public opinion, I analyzed how citizens’ perceptions that there was an important difference between a telephone poll using a random sample and

one using a sample that called a 1-800 number affected citizens' impressions of polling organizations. Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polls conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup. But I found that the perception that these two polling methodologies differ had no statistically significant effect upon impressions of polls conducted by nonprofit organizations or media polls. It is important to note however that respondents were asked whether they thought that the difference between these two types of polls made one better than the other. They were not asked *which poll* they thought was better though. It is quite possible that a number of respondents believe that the telephone poll where people call a 1-8800 number to participate is the better poll.

Future research should determine if this is the case, and if so, who are the people who believe this? This is important to our understanding of who pays attention to polls because people who perceive this type of poll as better are more likely going to pay attention to polling information from this type of poll. One implication of this is that the recent influx of self-selection polls conducted by and reported in the media could have a profound effect on the attitudes of people who believe that call-in and other self-selection polls offer useful information. The potential for opinion manipulation is vast when you consider how biased these polls are and how cheaply they can be conducted.

In this chapter I also found that political party identification is an important predictor of how citizens perceive polls. Specifically I found that Republicans and Democrats have favorable impressions of polls commissioned by political parties.

Democrats and Republicans likely view polls conducted by political parties as credible because they share the same interests as the parties. It would be interesting to see if, because the two major parties do not have interests in common with each other, Republicans and Democrats would have favorable impressions of polls conducted by the opposing political party. I would expect that they would be much more cynical of polls conducted by the other party. Further analysis of how partisans view party polls should include some examination of whether partisans find the opposing party's polls as credible.

As I expected, I found that Republicans, perhaps sensing that the media is hostile to their beliefs, view media polls more negatively. Moreover, conservatives have less favorable impressions of media polls. If the media is hostile to their beliefs, Republicans and conservatives do not find the media or media polls as credible sources of information. Therefore, when making their own political decisions, Republicans and conservatives might likely ignore media polls. They are also not likely to believe that government should pay attention to media polls when making important political decisions for the nation. In chapter six, I determine whether these two propositions are supported. But for now, it is clear that Republicans and conservatives do not hold media polls in high regard.

Finally, I found that more educated people have more favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations that rely on scientific polling practices. More educated people have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polling organizations such as Gallup. While I found no statistically significant relationship

between education and impressions of media polls, I did find that more highly educated individuals have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties. People with higher levels of education might be cynical of party polls because of their potential bias.

In sum, these findings offer a glimpse into the psychology of how polling information might persuade individual attitudes or when individuals might believe that polling information should persuade the attitudes of their leaders in Washington. Whether polling information is persuasive depends on whether people view it as credible and this begins with the impressions they have of the source of that information. In that chapter, I focused on citizens' evaluations of the polling organization or the types of polls themselves. In the next chapter, I tie citizens' impressions of polling organizations and polls into the larger model of how they perceive polls. I examine how their impressions of polls and polling organizations affect whether they pay attention to polls in their own political thinking and whether they think that government should pay attention to polls when making important political decisions for the nation.

Chapter VI

Confidence in the Collective's Political Judgments and Attention to Polls

In this chapter, I analyze what affects whether citizens pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions and whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. Specifically, I seek answers to several related questions. First, how do their perceptions of the accuracy of poll results affect citizens' attention to polls when forming political judgments? Further, how does this perceived accuracy affect citizens' belief that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country? How do citizens' impressions of the organizations that conduct polls affect these relationships? Moreover, does partisanship matter here? Are partisans more or less likely to find polls useful when making political judgments? Most importantly for this chapter though, how do citizens' evaluations of the opinions expressed in poll results affect whether they use polls in their own political thinking or whether they think government should pay attention to polls?

People may perceive polls as accurate representations of public opinion, but what if they think that the general public is ill-equipped to make important political decisions? In other words, what if they simply don't trust the collective's opinions represented in poll results? Citizens might not find representations of collective opinion in the form of poll results useful to their political thinking if they do not have confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens. Moreover, if citizens do not have confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens, they might believe that government should

not pay attention to public opinion polls when making important political decisions for the nation.

In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions by testing several related hypotheses. I posit that partisans, individuals with favorable impressions of polling organizations, and individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion find polls useful to them when forming their own political judgments. These individuals will also support the notion that their government leaders should pay attention to public opinion polls when making decisions for the country. Moreover, citizens with little confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans and those with higher levels of education are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming political judgments and are also less likely to believe that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the nation. I analyze these relationships using the same data obtained from a 2001 survey conducted by Princeton Research Associates and sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation in collaboration with *Public Perspectives* magazine I used to test my hypotheses in chapter five.

The findings in this chapter are important in two ways. First, they offer a new understanding of under what conditions people use polling information. Citizens learn about popular opinion from public opinion polls. But it is not a given that they use this political information when making their own political judgments. This chapter helps us to understand one condition under which citizens use this political information-when they find it credible. Polling information may serve as a cue to voters with limited political information. However, my findings here offer further evidence that credibility of cues

matters. If citizens don't see the political judgments of the mass public represented in polls results as credible, then polling information is hardly a useful cue for them to use.

Therefore, in the broader sense, my findings here add to our understanding of what information citizens use and when. Citizens are presented with a great deal of free information and information shortcuts that reduce the time and cognitive costs of amassing and analyzing political information (Popkin, 1994). This chapter is not a critique of citizens' use of polling information as shortcuts. It is instead a defense of the rationality of using polls results when making political decisions. If citizens have the belief that their fellow citizens are capable of forming good political judgments, then it is rational for them to use these collective judgments represented in poll results as a substitute for more detailed analysis when forming their own political judgments.

Moreover, my findings in this chapter add to our understanding of when people think that government should use polls to learn about the policy needs of the citizenry. In a democratic system where policy needs of the citizenry are often expressed to the government through public opinion polls, it is especially important to examine whether the citizenry thinks that the government should use these polls when making political decisions for the nation. In the next section, I focus on how these factors affect whether citizens pay attention to polls when making political decisions. Then I turn my attention to how these factors affect whether citizens believe that their government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation.

Recall from chapter two that "information shortcuts" substitute for more detailed political information and reduce the costs of voting (Popkin, 1994: 14). Individuals use

party and interest group endorsements (Lupia, 1994); media messages (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987); and elite opinion (Brody, 1991; Carmines and Kuklinski, 1990; Mondak, 1993) as information shortcuts. While these cues help voters save time and cognitive energy when voting and making other political decisions, the credibility of these cues is important to voters. Lupia (1992) and others (Grofman and Norrander, 1990; Lupia, 1994; Sobel, 1985; Brady and Sniderman, 1985) have found that credibility affects voters' use of cues. In this chapter, I analyze how citizens' perceptions of the credibility of the information contained in public opinion polls affects whether they pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments and whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making important political decisions for the country.

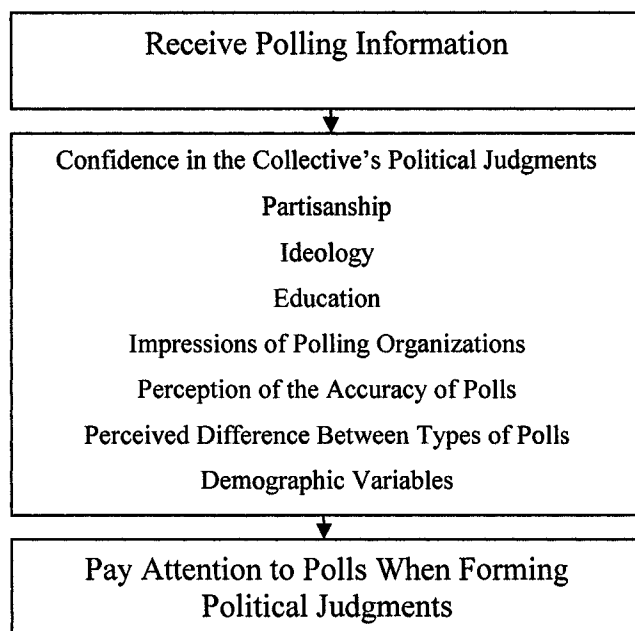
Do Citizens Pay Attention to Polls When Forming Their Own Political Judgments?

People do not use all of the information shortcuts or cues to which they are exposed. Whether they are persuaded by cues depends upon whether they think that those giving the cues are knowledgeable and they perceive that they have interests common to their own (Lupia, 2002). First, citizens may not perceive that all polling organizations have interests in common with them. Republicans, for instance may not have favorable impressions of media polls because they perceive the media as biased against them. Therefore, citizens' impressions of polling organizations might affect whether or not they incorporate polling information into their own political thinking.

Moreover, if individuals do not perceive the source of the information as knowledgeable, they will not use this information. If citizens do not believe that the

opinions represented in poll results are knowledgeable, then this information is not useful to them. Therefore, citizens' confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans, whose opinions are represented in poll results, likely affects their decisions to use polling information when making political decisions. Figure 6.1 below offers an illustration of the relationships between several factors and whether an individual pays attention to polls.

Figure 6.1. Factors Influencing Individual Attention to Polls



Individuals at every level of media consumption receive polling information. Then they evaluate this information and decide whether to pay attention to it when making political decisions—either forming judgments about policies or issues, or choosing between political candidates. I hypothesize that there are several factors that affect their decision to pay attention to polls including their confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens whose opinions are represented in poll results, their partisanship,

their ideology, their education, their impressions of polling organizations, their perceptions of the accuracy of polls, whether they perceive that there is a difference between telephone polls using random samples and those which do not, and several demographic variables known to affect individual political behavior.

I expect that individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion find polls more useful because of their perception that these polls are a credible information source. However, that they are accurate reflections of public opinion is not the only assessment of credibility citizens make. They also judge the credibility of the information itself. If they don't think that their fellow citizens are capable of forming good political judgments, then they will not use these polls, accurate or not. I hypothesize that people who do not trust the political judgments of their fellow Americans are not likely to use polling information as a cue when making political decisions. If they do not believe that people are capable of making sound political judgments, then poll results drawn from surveys with their fellow Americans are not useful to them.

Furthermore, an individual's perception that polling information is accurate is important to their decision to pay attention to it when making political decisions. If people perceive that public opinion polls are not accurate reflections of public opinion, they likely perceive these polls as having some bias. If they perceive polling information as biased, they find it not credible and therefore not persuasive. The following two hypotheses are intended to test the relationship between an individual's perceptions of the political judgments of his or her fellow Americans and whether he or she pays attention

to polls as well as between his or her perception of the accuracy of public opinion polls and whether he or she pays attention to polls when making political decisions.

H6A: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans pay less attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6B: Individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion pay more attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

Democrats and Republicans are likely familiar with the benefits of polling to political parties, including how parties use polls to raise money and to strategize (Herbst, 1993; Lavrakas and Traugott, 2000; Meyer, 1989) and to assess public attitudes on issues and discern candidate popularity (Herbst, 1993: 120). However, Democrats and Republicans might not view polls presented in the media in the same light. Democrats are more likely to pay attention to poll results when making political decisions because they see the benefits of polling to political parties and because they are less likely than Republicans to perceive the media as biased against them.

Conservatives do perceive the media as biased against them however. In a recent study, Pew found that 53% of Americans believe that news organizations are politically biased and twice as many say news organizations are "liberal" (51%) than "conservative" (26%), while 14% say neither phrase applies (July 13, 2003). Therefore, we might expect that conservatives will not find polling information reported in the media credible and therefore not pay attention to it when making their own political decisions.

H6C: Democrats are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6D: More conservative individuals are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

Individuals who have more favorable impressions of polling organizations likely perceive polling information as more credible. They are more likely to pay attention to polling information and use it as a cue when making political decisions. More educated people are less likely to pay attention to polling information though. More educated people might have a better understanding of the pitfalls of survey research. They might have a better understanding of the effect of question wording and question ordering problems upon survey results. They are likely more aware of the impossibility of generalizing unscientific poll results to the population. Overall then, they might be more skeptical of poll results and not find them credible. Therefore, they are less likely to incorporate poll results into their own political thinking. Better educated individuals also have other sources of political information so they may not need to or want to rely on representations of collective opinion as information shortcuts. Moreover, more educated people might have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans and thus not be persuaded by them. Therefore, I also expect to find support for the following two hypotheses:

H6E: Individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

H6F: More highly educated individuals are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, *ceteris paribus*.

In the next section, I discuss the data I used to test these hypotheses and how the dependent and independent variables were measured. I then discuss the results of the hypothesis testing.

Data and Measurement

I tested the hypotheses in this section and in the next section using data I obtained from the Roper Center for Public Opinion. This data, collected from a survey sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation in collaboration with Public Perspective magazine, is described in chapter five.

The dependent variable in this section, whether an individual pays attention to polls when forming his or her own political judgments, was measured by asking respondents Q.1.c. “In deciding where you stand on important issues, how much attention do you tend to pay to what public opinion polls say the American public thinks? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all?” Table 6.1 below summarizes frequencies for responses to Q.1.c. I recoded response to question Q.1.c so that higher numbers reflected more attention to public opinion polls.

Table 6.1. Attention to Public Opinion Polls

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
A great deal	98	8.1	8.1
A fair amount	309	25.6	25.6
Not too much	477	39.6	39.6
None at all	299	24.8	24.8
Don't know	17	1.4	1.4
Refused	6	.5	.5
Total	1206	100.0	100.0

Independent Variables

The Kaiser data provided me with the opportunity to analyze how citizens' perceptions of the judgments of their fellow citizens, or what I refer to as "the collective," affects their use of polls in forming their own political judgments. The Kaiser questionnaire included two series of questions that measure respondents' confidence in the political judgments of the American public. One half of the respondents were asked about their confidence in the public's political judgments about the general direction that elected officials should take on several issues such as education and foreign policy. The other half were asked about their confidence in the American public's judgments about laws on these same issues debated in Congress. I used this second set of questions to measure citizens' confidence in the judgments of their fellow Americans because I wanted to focus specifically on whether citizens have confidence in the laws upon which their representative vote. If an individual believes in more of a delegate model of representation, he or she wants members of Congress to consult with constituents before voting on laws before them.

Therefore, I measured confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans by creating a scale from responses to these questions that asked respondents to evaluate the public's judgments about laws debated in Congress in four areas of public policy. Half of the total sample was asked Q.7. "For each of the following issues, please tell me if you think the public can make sound judgments about the details of laws and regulations debated in Congress. (First/Next), do you think the public can make sound judgments about the details of laws and regulations debated in Congress regarding

(Insert), or don't you feel this way?" Table 6.2 below summarizes the responses to this series of questions.

Table 6.2. Can the Public Make Sound Judgments About the Details of Laws and Regulations Debated in Congress?

Policy Area	Frequency yes/no	Percent (of total sample) yes/no	Valid Percent (of respondents asked Q.7.) yes/no
Economic Issues ^a	337/225	27.9/18.7	60.0/40.0
Health care Issues ^b	411/151	34.1/12.5	73.1/26.9
Education Issues ^c	397/163	32.9/13.5	70.9/29.1
Foreign Policy Issues ^d	245/314	20.3/26.0	43.8/56.2

Q.7. a. "economic issues, such as what taxes should be or how the budget surplus ought to be spent"

Q.7. b. "health care issues, such as whether to expand health insurance coverage to the uninsured"

Q.7. c. "education issues, such as how much money should be spent or testing for teachers"

Q.7. d. "foreign policy issues, such as whether to send our troops to another country or expanding our military"

For each of the four questions, "yes" was coded as "0" and "no" was coded as "1." I then summed the responses to the four questions which created a scale of confidence in the collective that ranged from 0-4, where higher numbers reflected less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans. The scale items hung together fairly well (Cronbach's $\alpha = .680$). 29.3% of respondents asked the four questions were scored "0" in the confidence in the collective scale, meaning they believed that the public was capable of forming sound judgments about laws debated in Congress in all four areas of public policy. 26% scored a "1." 20.5% scored a "2." 11.8% scored a "3." 12.4% scored a "4," meaning they had no confidence that their

fellow Americans could make sound judgments about the laws debated in Congress in all four areas of public policy. The median for the scale was 1.

To measure citizens' perceptions of polls and polling organizations, respondents were asked about their overall impressions of five types of polls: media polls, academic research polls, those commissioned by nonprofit organizations and foundations, those conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup, and those commissioned by political parties. I recoded the responses to Q.43 so higher numbers reflected more favorable ratings. Table 5.1 in chapter five summarizes the frequencies of favorability ratings for each of the five types of polls. I added the responses to create the impressions of polls scale that ranged from 5.0 (not at all favorable impression of all five polling organizations) to 20.0 (very favorable impression of all of the polling organizations). The scale was internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .745$). The mean for the scale was 14.11 ($\sigma = .127$), indicating that the respondents had generally favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations. As Table 5.1 in the previous chapter shows however, respondents had more favorable impressions of polls conducted by academic research centers, polling organizations such as Gallup and Harris, and by nonprofit organizations than of polls conducted by the media or political parties.

I also expect that an individual's perception of the accuracy of public opinion polls, his or her perception that there is an important difference between a telephone poll conducted using a random sample and a telephone poll where the respondents select themselves by calling a 1-800 number, his or her partisanship, and his or her education affects whether he or she pays attention to polls when forming political judgments. In the

analysis, I also controlled for several socioeconomic and other demographic variables that have been found to affect citizens' political behavior. I controlled for ideology, age, gender, income, and race. Chapter five includes the question wording and descriptive statistics for each of these variables.

Analysis and Results

Table 6.3 below shows the results of the hypothesis testing using OLS. The results indicate that that an individual's confidence in the collective judgments of his or her fellow citizens, education, race, perception that there is an important difference between telephone polls conducted upon random samples and self-selection samples, being Democrat, and impressions of polling organizations each have a statistically significant effect upon whether he or she pays attention to polls when forming political judgments.

Table 6.3. Who Pays Attention to Polls?

	B	se	P <
constant	1.050	.564	.064
confidence in the collective's political judgments	-.107	.047	.024
polls accurate	.025	.146	.866
ideology	.038	.081	.642
age	.006	.004	.156
education	-.178	.063	.005
gender	.098	.130	.454
income	-.014	.035	.697
race	-.444	.193	.023
importance difference between samples	.129	.070	.065
Democrat	.390	.143	.007
impressions of polls scale	.099	.026	.000

dependent variable: Q.1c. "In deciding where you stand on important issues, how much attention do you tend to pay to what public opinion polls say the American public thinks? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all?"

n = 175

R² = .311

There is evidence to support **H6A**: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans pay less attention to polls when forming their own political judgments ($B = -.107, P < .024$). It makes sense that if people do not find the opinions represented in poll results credible, they do not pay attention to poll results when making their own political decisions. Whether people perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion does not have a statistically significant effect on whether they pay attention to polls however. I found no support for **H6B**: Individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion pay more attention to polls when forming their own political judgments ($B = .025, P < .866$).

I initially tested **H6C**: Democrats are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments, by including both Democrat and Republican in the analysis. However, Republican and ideology were highly collinear (Pearson's $r = .860, P < .000$), so Republican was excluded in the regression analysis. I found that Democrat and ideology were not highly collinear (Pearson's $r = -.097, P < .002$). Therefore, I did the analysis including ideology and Democrat. I found that Democrats do pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments ($B = .390, P < .007$). However, I did not find support for **H6D**. More conservative ideology does not affect whether an individual pays attention to polls when making political decisions ($B = .038, P < .642$).

I also found support for **H6E**: Individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments. The effect of an individual's impressions of polling organizations

has a small, but statistically significant effect upon whether he or she pays attention to polls ($B = .099, P < .007$).

Finally, I found support for **H6F**: More highly educated individuals are less likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments ($B = -.178, P < .005$). More educated people likely have more knowledge about politics and public policy. They might also not have a great deal of confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans. I found that confidence in the public's political judgments and education were correlated, but not very strongly (Pearson's $r = .129, P < .003$). More educated people might be more skeptical of polls because they might be more aware of some of the methodological problems that can occur even with scientific polls such as question wording and question ordering problems. More educated people might also be more aware of the media's inadequate reporting of methodological details in reports about polls and therefore be less inclined to pay attention to poll results reported in the media when making their own political decisions.

As I found in chapter five, people do not view all polls and polling organizations in the same light. For example, respondents in the Kaiser survey had less favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties than those conducted by academic research centers. In the analysis above, I looked at how citizens' impressions of the five types of polls and polling organizations affected whether they paid attention polls. But it would be interesting to determine if citizens' impressions of the different types of polls or polling organizations have different effects upon whether they pay attention to polls when making political decisions. I regressed attention to polls upon the explanatory variables,

including respondents' impressions of each of the five types of polls and polling organizations. I found that looking at the polling organizations separately, citizens' favorable impressions of media polls result in their paying more attention to polls.

If we look at this finding with the findings in chapter five, it is clear that an individual's impression of the media and media polls is an important determinant of whether they incorporate the information contained in polls into their own political thinking. Whether people view the media as a credible source is integral to their use of information reported in the media, especially poll results.

Table 6.4. Impressions of Different Polls and Polling Organizations and Attention to Polls

	B	se	P <
constant	1.020	.577	.079
confidence in the collective's political judgments	-.105	.048	.031
polls accurate	.029	.149	.844
ideology	.047	.084	.578
age	.006	.005	.172
education	-.177	.066	.008
gender	.107	.133	.423
income	-.012	.036	.749
race	-.444	.197	.025
importance difference between samples	.134	.072	.064
Democrat	.383	.145	.009
impressions of academic research polls	.060	.116	.608
impressions of polling organizations like Gallup	.055	.100	.586
impressions of media polls	.169	.087	.054
impressions of nonprofit organizations' polls	.135	.094	.154
impressions of political party polls	.066	.085	.437

dependent variable: Q.1c. "In deciding where you stand on important issues, how much attention do you tend to pay to what public opinion polls say the American public thinks? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all?"

n = 175

R² = .315

Overall, the findings in this section are important because we have new evidence of under what circumstances people pay attention to some information available to them-

the information contained in public opinion poll results. We know that people are not sheep who blindly follow the polls. Nor is it the case that people ignore the political information contained in public opinion polls. There are several factors that affect whether people pay attention to polls when forming political judgments of their own. In short, whether they perceive the opinion contained in polls results and the source of the polling information credible is important to their decision to pay attention to poll results when making political decisions.

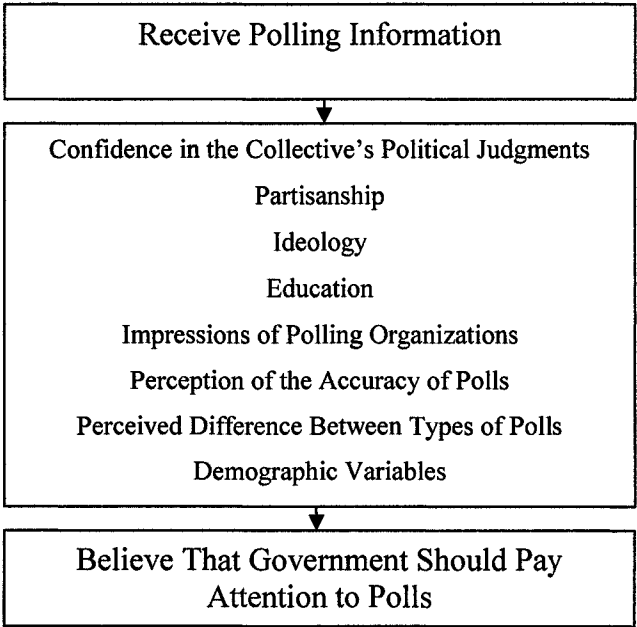
Do citizens believe that government should pay attention to public opinion polls?

There remains however another fundamental question. If polls signal the will of the people to their leaders, should these leaders use these polls when making political decisions for the country? More specifically, do citizens believe that their leaders should use these polls when making important decisions for the nation? In the following section, I show that some of the same factors that affect whether an individual uses polls in his or her political thinking also affect whether he or she believes that government should pay attention to polls when making important decisions for the country.

In this section, I examine the relationship between citizens' perceptions of the accuracy of polls, their trust of the American public's political judgments, partisanship, and education and their belief that the government should pay attention to polls when making important decisions for the country. I propose that although public opinion polls are one of the best means to signal the needs of the citizenry to their government, not all citizens believe that government should use these polls when making political decisions. In fact, I posit that the same characteristics that affect an individual's use of polls in his or

her own political thinking are those which affect his or her belief that the government should use polls when making decisions for the country. This relationship is depicted in Figure 6.2 below.

Figure 6.2. Factors Influencing Citizens' Beliefs that Government Should Pay Attention to Public Opinion Polls



I propose that individuals who do not feel that their fellow Americans are capable of making good political judgments do not want the government to pay attention to poll results when making decisions for the nation. If they do not find the political judgments of their fellow citizens credible, then they do not want their government to use this information in the governing process. I also expect that individuals who do not perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion do not want government to pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. If polling information is

not accurate, then it offers no valuable information to government. In this section, I test these two additional hypotheses:

H6G: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6H: Individuals who perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

I also expect partisanship and ideology to affect an individual's belief that government should pay attention to polls. For the same reasons that they might be more willing to pay attention to poll results, Democrats might be more willing to believe that government should pay attention to poll results. Democrats are likely to see the benefits of polling, especially to members of their own political party. The party can be more responsive to its members if it knows about their positions on the various policy issues. Furthermore, partisans have higher levels of internal and external political efficacy (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1996). Increased external efficacy in particular might drive partisans to believe that government should pay attention to polls.

Democrats are not as likely to perceive poll results reported in the media as biased against their interests. However, Republicans do perceive the media as biased against them. Therefore, although Republicans may have high external efficacy, they are not likely to want government to pay attention to poll results reported in a biased media. I also expect conservatives, because they perceive the media, and by extension polls reported in the media, as biased against them, to not want government to pay attention to polls when making political decisions. Therefore, I test the following hypotheses:

H6I: Democrats are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6J: More conservative individuals are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

I also analyze how citizens' impressions of polling organizations and their education level affect their beliefs about government paying attention to public opinion poll results when making decisions for the nation. I expect that individuals who have more favorable impressions of polls will find polling information more credible and want government to pay attention to it.

However, better educated people will likely want to government not to pay attention to poll results. As I discussed previously in this chapter, individuals with higher levels of education might be more aware of the methodological problems associated with survey research. Even if they believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology, they might have a better understanding of the effects of question wording and question ordering on survey responses and therefore be a little more skeptical of using poll results as an information shortcut. In addition, better educated people might believe that the general public does not have a grasp on the issues and are therefore not competent to make sound political judgments. More educated people might want their elected leaders to rely on their own judgment. Or they might want their representatives to pay attention to citizens who are more knowledgeable than the general public like those in interest groups or those who attend town hall meetings.

H6K: Individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

H6L: More educated individuals are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus*.

Measurement-Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, the belief that the government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country was measured using a scale I created from several questions asked in the Kaiser survey. The individual scale items are described in Table 6.5 below. “Don’t know” and refusals are not included. Valid percent is in parentheses.

Table 6.5. Individual Items in Belief that Government Should Pay Attention to Polls Scale

Government should use polls when making decisions	a great deal	a fair amount	not too much	none at all	Total
economic issues ¹	545 (45.7%)	477 (40.0%)	136 (11.4%)	35 (2.9%)	1193
healthcare issues ²	632 (53.2%)	438 (36.8%)	92 (7.7%)	27 (2.3%)	1189
education issues ³	645 (54.3%)	430 (36.2%)	95 (8.0%)	18 (1.5%)	1188
foreign policy issues ⁴	408 (34.5%)	449 (38.0%)	245 (20.7%)	80 (6.8%)	1182
social issues ⁵	581 (49.3%)	421 (35.7%)	126 (10.7%)	50 (4.2%)	1178

¹Q. 29a. “When officials in Washington make decisions about [economic issues, such as what taxes should be or how the budget surplus ought to be spent], how much attention should they pay to what public opinion polls say the public thinks? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all?”

²Q.29b. “[health care issues, such as whether to expand health insurance coverage to the uninsured]”

³Q.29c. “[education issues, such as how much money should be spent or testing for teachers]”

⁴Q.29d. “[foreign policy issues, such as whether to send our troops to another country or expanding our military]”

⁵Q.29e. “[social issues, such as the death penalty or abortion]”

The items in the belief that government should pay attention to polls scale hung together well (Cronbach's alpha = .821). I added the items creating a scale that ranged from 5 (government should pay no attention to polls on any of the 5 issues) to 20 (government should pay a great deal of attention to polls on all of the five policy issues). The mean for the government should pay attention to polls scale was 16.46 ($\sigma=3.0$). OLS regression results are listed in Table 6.6 below.

Table 6.6. Who Believes that Government Should Pay Attention to Polls?

	B	se	P<
constant	21.682	1.906	.000
confidence in the collective's political judgments scale	-.600	.162	.000
polls accurate	.612	.495	.218
ideology	.078	.274	.775
age	-.011	.015	.473
education	-1.167	.215	.000
gender	-.621	.441	.162
income	-.024	.119	.843
race	-.896	.650	.170
importance difference between samples	-.233	.240	.333
Democrat	.424	.482	.380
impressions of polls scale	.069	.089	.438

dependent variable: should government in Washington pay attention to polls scale
 $R^2 = .344$
 $n = 173$

I found support for **H6G**: Individuals who have less confidence in the political judgments of their fellow Americans are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues, *ceteris paribus* ($B = -.600$, $P < .000$). Whether an individual has confidence in the opinions represented in poll results affects whether they pay attention to polls and whether they think the government should pay attention to polls. If citizens do not believe that their fellow Americans are capable of forming sound political judgments

about public policy issues, then they do not want their government leaders to consult public opinion polls when making important policy decisions. These individuals might be more inclined to support a trustee model of representation. Whether this is the case is an important area of research that needs further attention.

I briefly analyzed the relationship between confidence in the public's political judgments and support for more of a trustee style of representation using questions from the Kaiser survey. There were two questions in the Kaiser survey that could be used to measure an individual's belief that government leaders should follow either more of a delegate model of representation or a trustee model of representation. First, respondents were asked Q.13. "And how much influence do you think the views of the majority of Americans should have on the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or none at all?" 67.2% said "a great deal." 27.4% of the respondents answered "a fair amount." 3.7% said "not too much." Less than one percent said "none at all."

I also used a question in the Kaiser survey that asked respondents to chose between two models of representation, one where the government follows the majority and the other where government official rely on their own knowledge and judgment. Respondents were asked Q.14.¹ I recoded the responses to create two variables-officials should use best judgment and officials should follow the majority. 51.4% of respondents

¹ Respondents were asked Q.14. "I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me which comes closer to your views, even if neither is exactly right. The first statement is, elected and government officials should use their knowledge and judgments to make decisions about what is the best policy to pursue, even if this goes against what the majority of the public wants. The second statement is, elected and government officials should follow what the majority wants, even if it goes against the officials' knowledge and judgment. Which comes closer to your views?"

said that officials should follow what the majority wants. 44.5% said that officials should use their own knowledge and judgment. 3.2% said “don’t know.”

I found that decreased confidence in the collective judgments of the public was positively correlated with the belief that government officials should use their own knowledge and judgment (Pearson’s $r = .150$, $P < .001$). In other words, people who do not believe that the public is competent at forming sound political judgments about laws and regulations debated in Congress about public policy believe that their elected leaders should use their own judgment and knowledge. This indicates that people with little confidence in the collective political judgments of their fellow Americans support more of a trustee model of representation.

Decreased confidence in the political judgments of the public is negatively correlated with the belief that government should follow the majority (Pearson’s $r = -.150$, $P < .001$). Moreover, I found that decreased confidence in the judgments of the public was also negatively correlated with the other measure of support for the delegate model of representation-the idea that the views of the majority of Americans *should* influence the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington (Pearson’s $r = -.221$, $P < .000$). This offers evidence to support that claim that citizens with little or no confidence in their fellow citizens’ ability to make sound political judgments are not supportive of the delegate model of representation.

I found mixed results for the remaining hypothesis testing. I found no support for **H6H**, **H6I**, or **H6J**. Whether an individual perceives polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion had no effect upon whether he or she believes that government should pay

attention to polls when making important decisions for the nation ($B = .612, P < .218$). I also found no statistically significant relationship between being a Democrat ($B = .424, P < .380$) or being more conservative ($B = .078, P < .775$) and the belief that government should pay attention to polls. I did find support for **H6L**. More highly educated individuals are less likely to believe that the national government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the country about important issues ($B = -1.167, P < .000$). I believe that there are two possible explanations for why better educated people do not believe that government should pay attention to polls.

First, it is likely that better educated people want government to follow less of a delegate style of representation and more of a trustee model of representation. It is likely that better educated people have a better understanding of the details of public policy and the lawmaking process. They might be inclined to support a model of representation that presupposes that elected and other government officials have some level of expertise and knowledge that makes them more competent at making decisions about complicated policy issues. I found that higher levels of education are associated with decreased support for the idea that government should follow the majority (Pearson's $r = -.130, P < .000$) and increased support for the idea that government officials should use their own knowledge and judgments when making policy decisions (Pearson's $r = .130, P < .000$). I found no statistically significant relationship between education and the other measure of support of the delegate model-the belief that the majority *should* have an influence on the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington (Pearson's $r = -.030, P <$

.299). However, there is some evidence that individuals with higher levels of education might be more supportive of a trustee model of representation.

I did not find support for **H6K**. An individual's overall impressions of the five types of polls and polling organizations had no effect upon whether he or she believes that the national government should pay attention to polls ($B = .069, P < .438$). As in the previous section, I examined whether an individual's impressions of any one of the polls and polling organizations affected whether he or she believes that government should pay attention to polls. The results are in Table 6.7 below.

Table 6.7. Impressions of Different Polling Organizations and Belief That Government Should Pay Attention to Polls

	B	se	P<
constant	21.326	1.932	.000
confidence in the collective's political judgments scale	-.601	.163	.000
polls accurate	.714	.498	.153
ideology	.051	.284	.858
age	-.010	.015	.525
education	-1.147	.221	.000
gender	-.658	.444	.141
income	-.001	.121	.995
race	-.946	.656	.152
importance difference between samples	-.288	.246	.243
Democrat	.425	.484	.381
impressions of academic research polls	-.002	.388	.996
impressions of polling organizations like Gallup	-.097	.334	.772
impressions of media polls	-.111	.293	.706
impressions of nonprofit organizations' polls	.664	.315	.037
impressions of political party polls	-.054	.285	.849

dependent variable: should government in Washington pay attention to polls scale

$R^2 = .362$

$n = 173$

I found that of all of the polls, only citizens' impressions of nonprofit organizations' polls affected their belief that government should pay attention to polls

when making important decisions for the nation. Individuals with favorable impressions of nonprofit or foundation polls are more likely to believe that the government should pay attention to public opinion polls when making decisions for the nation ($B = .664$, $P < .037$). Perhaps individuals familiar with nonprofit groups and foundations believe that the issues about which these groups might poll people are those where there are issue publics with intense and well-informed opinions. Therefore, if citizens have favorable impressions of their polls, they might believe that this polling information is useful and informative to government about what people who are involved with an issue or policy want.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

Overall, I found that there are several factors that affect whether an individual pays attention to polls when making political decisions or believes that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. Individuals who do not think that their fellow Americans can form sound political judgments do not pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions. Poll results are not useful cues to these people because they do not think the opinions represented in poll results are knowledgeable or because they do not think the public is capable of forming sound political judgments. Further, people who are not confident in the political judgments of their fellow Americans do not believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. I posit that this too is about credibility. If the opinions represented in poll results are not credible, then poll results are not useful cues for government to learn about the needs of the citizenry.

Individuals with higher levels of education also do not pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions. Moreover, they do not think that government should pay attention to polls when making important decisions for the country. Better educated people, like people who are not confident about the political judgments of their fellow Americans, do not find polling information credible. I believe that better educated people do not place a great deal of trust in the opinions of their fellow Americans because they may believe that the average American either doesn't know enough about politics and public policy or cannot analyze issues sufficiently to be able to express meaningful opinions to representatives. I proposed that better educated people and people with little confidence in the public's political judgments might be more inclined to support a trustee model of representation where elected officials rely on their own knowledge and conscience to make decisions for their constituents and not on majority opinion.

I found that decreased confidence in the collective judgments of the public was positively correlated with the belief that government officials should use their own knowledge and judgment and negatively correlated with the belief that government should follow the majority. In addition, I found that decreased confidence in the judgments of the public was also negatively correlated with increased support for the idea that the views of the majority of Americans *should* influence the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington. I believe that these findings offer some evidence to support that claim that citizens with little or no confidence in their fellow citizens' ability to make sound political judgments are not supportive of the delegate model of representation and are more supportive of a trustee model of representation.

I found similar results when I analyzed the effect of education upon views about representation. I hypothesized that because better educated people might have a better understanding of the lawmaking process and the details of public policy, they might be more inclined to leave governing to their representatives. I posit that better educated people do not have a great of trust in the average American's ability to grasp and synthesize complicated political issues. Therefore they do not want government to follow majority opinion. I found that higher levels of education are associated with decreased support for the idea that government should follow the majority and increased support for the idea that government officials should use their own knowledge and judgments when making policy decisions.

If these people do not think that the government should rely on the majority to make political decisions, what do they think government should pay attention to, in addition to their own knowledge and judgment? Respondents were asked to identify how much attention they felt elected officials should pay to several sources when making decisions about important issues.² I found that education was negatively correlated with the belief that when making important decisions, government should pay attention to members of the public who contact them about the issue (Pearson's $r = -.068$, $P < .108$). This supports the claim that people with higher levels of education do not support the

² Respondents were asked Q. 23. "For each of the following, please tell me how much attention you feel elected and government officials in Washington should pay to when making decisions about important issues. Generally speaking, when elected and government officials in Washington make decisions about important issues, how much attention do you feel they should pay to [insert]? A great deal, a fair amount, not too much or none at all? A. their own knowledge on the issue; B. their conscience or judgment, that is, what they think is the right thing to do; C. policy experts involved with the issue; D. members if the public who contact them about the issue; E. their campaign contributors; F. public opinion polls; G. lobbyists and special interest groups; I. what journalists say about the issue."

delegate model of representation. Better educated people also do not support the idea that government should pay attention to campaign contributors (Pearson's $r = -.133$, $P < .002$), journalists (Pearson's $r = -.090$, $P < .032$), or lobbyists (Pearson's $r = -.187$, $P < .000$). It is likely that people with higher levels of education perceive campaign contributors and lobbyists as biased and therefore view them with some caution.

It is also possible that better educated people believe that government should pay attention to other outlets for mass and elite opinion, rather than public opinion polls. People with higher levels of education might believe for instance that government should pay attention to people with greater expertise in an area of public policy. I found that higher levels of education was not correlated with the belief that government should pay attention to policy experts though (Pearson's $r = .050$, $P < .231$).

Interestingly, using Q.23, I found no statistically significant relationship between education and the belief that government should pay attention to their own conscience and judgment (Pearson's $r = .061$, $P < .143$) and to their own knowledge on issues (Pearson's $r = .047$, $P < .260$) when making important decisions on issues. Previously, I found a positive relationship between increased education and support for the idea that government officials should rely more on their own knowledge and judgment rather than follow the majority. It is possible that when asked whether they support one model of representation versus the other, citizens do prefer one model over the other. But when asked if they support one model without comparing it to the other, they may not be as supportive. In other words, framing is important here. In Q.14, respondents were asked which of the two statements best represented their views, even if neither matched their

views exactly. Because of these mixed findings, future research should further examine how educational level affects citizens' support for the delegate and trustee models of representation and how framing might affect these relationships.

I also looked at the correlations between confidence in the collective's political judgments and belief that government should pay attention to these other sources of information. I found that decreased confidence in the collective's political judgments is negatively correlated with the belief that when making important decisions, government should pay attention to members of the public who contact them about the issue (Pearson's $r = -.134$, $P < .002$). This lends support to the claim that people with little confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens do not support the delegate model of representation. They also do not support the idea that government should pay attention to campaign contributors (Pearson's $r = -.201$, $P < .000$), journalists (Pearson's $r = -.149$, $P < .001$), or lobbyists (Pearson's $r = -.170$, $P < .000$). I also found no statistically significant correlation between confidence in the collective's political judgments and the belief that government should pay attention to policy experts (Pearson's $r = -.050$, $P < .257$).

Using Q.23, I found no statistically significant relationship between confidence in the collective's political judgments and the belief that government should pay attention to their own conscience and judgment (Pearson's $r = -.027$, $P < .548$) and to their own knowledge on issues (Pearson's $r = -.047$, $P < .289$) when making important decisions on issues. More research needs to be done to determine whether framing is important here as well. It is possible that when given the option between the two models of

)

representation, more educated people and people with little confidence in the judgments of their fellow Americans support the trustee model of representation. But when not forced to choose between the two models, they support neither to any great extent.

I also found that whether people perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion does not have a statistically significant effect on whether they pay attention to polls or whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. I posit that there are several components that make up an individual's perception of the accuracy of polls, including whether methodological details such as question wording and question ordering are included with the results, whether the poll results include the sponsor, and whether the results are interpreted correctly. We need to ask respondents more detailed questions about their perceptions of polls to adequately understand what affects their perceptions of the accuracy of polls. I believe that framing will be really important here. If an individual does not believe that scientific polls are valid ways of measuring public opinion, then framing a poll as "unscientific" or "here's what people like you who called us thought" might make it seem more accurate. Further research should focus on how framing polls affects different people's perceptions of polls.

I found that Democrats do pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments. But I did not find that Democrats are more likely to believe that government should pay attention to polls. I believe that polls serve as a useful information shortcut for Democrats, if they find the opinions represented in polls as credible. Democrats do not see the media as biased against them as Republicans do and are therefore more

willing to accept polling information presented in the media as credible. Any perceptions of media bias they do perceive is likely offset by their perceptions that polls are beneficial to their political party. Future research should test this claim however. Future survey research on how partisans might perceive polling information in the media should ask respondents several questions to measure how they perceive polling information from specific media outlets. I believe that we might find that Republicans are more willing to accept polling information from Fox News and other more conservative media outlets as credible.

I did not find a statistically significant relationship between ideology and whether an individual pays attention to polls or believes that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. I believe that while conservatives see the media as biased against them, they too might be more willing to accept as credible polling information from a media source they trust. But it is also likely that there are some people who identify themselves as ideologically conservative and who rely less on science in their day-to-day lives and more upon spirituality. Future research should examine how citizens' trust of science affects their perceptions of public opinion polls, especially those framed as "scientific." I believe that individuals who do not trust science and rely more on a faith-based view of the world will not find scientific polls credible and may be more willing to believe that polls framed as "unscientific" are more credible. I elaborate upon this in chapter seven.

An additional factor that might help explain why people pay attention to polling information is their perception of polling organizations. I found that individuals with

more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments. I found that only citizens' favorable impressions of polls conducted by nonprofit organizations and foundations affected their belief that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the nation however. Future research should examine why citizens with favorable impressions of polls might make a distinction between their using polling information and their belief that government should use polling information to make political decisions.

In this chapter, I found evidence that there are several factors that affect whether people use polling information as a cue when making political decisions. Some of these factors also affect whether people believe that government should pay attention to polling information when making important decisions for the nation. The main finding in this chapter is that people do not all use polling information in their political thinking. Future research should examine whether the methodology of a poll affects these findings. In other words, are some people more willing to pay attention to unscientific polls when forming political judgments? I discuss this and other suggestions for future research in the next chapter.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Public opinion polls it seems are everywhere. Media reports about polls offer citizens information about the opinions of their fellow citizens and inform elected leaders about the opinions of their constituents. Therefore, media reports about polls are very much part of the American political experience. In this project, my goal was to answer several research questions about how the news media presents polling information and how citizens perceive and use polling information. In this chapter, I discuss my overall findings and offer suggestions for future research in this area. Overall, I believe that my findings offer an additional explanation for why people choose to use some political information, namely polling information, to which they are exposed and reject other information. It depends upon how credible they perceive polling information. This is based upon their perceptions of the methodology of polls, their confidence in the collective whose opinion is represented in polls, and a number of other factors. In addition to helping us to better understand how people perceive and use political information, my findings here may help shed light upon how citizens believe government should respond to the opinions of their constituents. We might have an even better understanding of what affects citizens' perceptions of representation by looking at how polls fit within American democracy.

I proposed a model of how people perceive public opinion polls and whether they pay attention to or expect government to pay attention to public opinion polling information that expands upon our previous understanding of how people perceive public

opinion polling information. First, citizens are exposed to political information in the media. Then they evaluate this information, judging the validity of the polling methodology and the credibility of the source of the polling information. Then they decide whether to incorporate it into their own political decision-making and their attitudes about whether government should incorporate this information into its decision-making as well.

The previous research shows us that people are influenced by polls and that the nature and amount of polling information reported in the media varies by media source. Previous studies have also shown us that when evaluating information, people do make some judgment of the credibility of that information. The model I proposed has some roots in the research on persuasion in that I believe that in order for an individual to find polling information useful to them-in order for it to be persuasive-he or she must find it credible. I proposed that an individual's perception that polling information is credible depends on whether he or she finds the source of the polling information and the people whose opinions are represented in the polling information knowledgeable and whether citizens perceive that the source of this polling information is not biased against them.

Citizens receive most polling information from the media. But media outlets vary in their coverage of polls. In fact, I found that newspapers, network news, and cable news vary in their conformity to American Association of Public Opinion Research minimum standards for disclosure about poll results. In chapter three, I found that the *New York Times*, the *NBC Nightly News*, and CNN's *The Situation Room* do not conform well to AAPOR minimum standards for disclosure. I also found that television news

reports about polls include less methodological information than do newspaper reports about polls. I found that in its reports about polls, the *New York Times* conformed better to AAPOR standards in reporting poll conductor or sponsor, question wording, definition of the population, how the sample was chosen, sample size, and the time, location, and method of the survey than did the *NBC Nightly News*. But overall, the *Times* conformity to the AAPOR standards was still not good. In addition, CNN's *The Situation Room*, despite its greater amount of broadcast time, does not conform well to the AAPOR standards either.

The low conformity to AAPOR minimum standards for disclosure might help explain why many citizens are skeptical of public opinion polls. Most citizens are exposed to polls and surveys in the news media. If the media does not do a good job at explaining the details about the polls they include in their stories, citizens' knowledge about polls and polling methodology will not improve. They will also have a difficult time distinguishing between scientific and unscientific polls. One consequence of this is that people might use information they might not deem credible if they understood it better to make political decisions. For citizens to have a better understanding of polls and for them to be able to better judge the credibility of those reported in the media, it is important for the media to provide citizens with this information.

If newspapers do a better job of disclosing the technical details about the polls they include in their stories, will newspaper readers be more accepting of scientific survey methodology? In chapter four, I found that newspaper readers and individuals who are more liberal are more likely to believe that a random sample of 1500 or 2000

people can accurately reflect the views of the nation's population. More conservative individuals were less likely to believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology.

But another question we might ask is how do citizens perceive polling organizations such as Gallup? If they do not find the polling organization credible, they will not perceive the polling information provided by these organizations as credible. In chapter five, I found that there are several factors that explain variation in citizens' impressions of polls and polling organizations, such as partisanship, ideology, education, the belief in the validity of scientific polling methodology, and the general belief that polls are accurate reflections of mass opinion. For instance, citizens' perceptions that polls are accurate reflections of public opinion translate into their having more favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations. In short, citizens' perceptions that polling information is credible may start with their perception that they are accurate. If individuals who perceive polls as accurate reflections of public opinion have favorable impressions of media and academic polls, those commissioned by political parties or nonprofit groups, and those conducted by polling organizations like Gallup, we might find that these individuals might be equally influenced by all of these types of polls.

However, asking people whether they think polls are accurate reflections of public opinion does not require that they make any specific evaluation of the methodology of polls. As I showed in chapter four, people do vary in their perceptions of scientific polling methodology. In chapter five, I showed that their perceptions of scientific polling methodology partially explain citizens' impressions of various polls and polling organizations. I found that individuals who believe in the validity of scientific survey

methodology have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls, nonprofit and foundation polls, and polling organizations like Gallup and Harris. This finding is not surprising because we might expect that people who believe that scientific polling methodology is a valid way of measuring public opinion might view polls with reputations for using scientific polling methodology in a more favorable light.

However, I was surprised by my finding that people who believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology have favorable impressions of media polls. Because the media offers so few details about their polls and other polls about which they report, I expected that people who see scientific polling methodology as a valid way of measuring public opinion to view media polls more negatively. But because the respondents in the Kaiser survey were asked about their impressions of “polls by media organizations, such as the CBS-New York Times poll or the Newsweek poll,” not how they felt about how polls were reported in the media, I posited that it was plausible that people do not view the media polls negatively. Instead they might view media reports about the polls negatively.

In addition to how their perceptions that scientific polling methodology was a valid way of measuring public opinion, in chapter five, I also analyzed how citizens’ perceptions that there was an important difference between a telephone poll using a random sample and one using a sample that called a 1-800 number affected their impressions of polling organizations. Individuals who think that there is an important difference between polls conducted using random samples and those using nonrandom samples have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polls

conducted by polling organizations such as Gallup. But I found that the perception that these two polling methodologies differ had no statistically significant effect upon impressions of polls conducted by nonprofit organizations or media polls. In chapter five, I noted that the respondents were asked whether they thought that the difference between these two types of polls made one better than the other. They were not asked *which poll* they thought was better though. It is quite possible that a number of respondents believe that the telephone poll where people call a 1-800 number to participate is the better poll. Future research should examine how people perceive each of these two types of polls to determine whether there are characteristics associated with the belief that the unscientific self-selection poll, for instance, is the better poll.

In chapter five, I also found that political party identification is an important predictor of how citizens perceive polls. Specifically I found that Republicans and Democrats have favorable impressions of polls commissioned by political parties. Democrats and Republicans likely view polls conducted by political parties as credible because they share the same interests as the parties. As I expected, I found that Republicans and conservatives, perhaps sensing that the media is hostile to their beliefs, view media polls more negatively. If the media is hostile to their beliefs, Republicans and conservatives do not find the media or media polls as credible sources of information. Therefore, when making their own political decisions, Republicans and conservatives might likely ignore media polls. They are also not likely to believe that government should pay attention to media polls when making important political decisions for the nation.

Finally, in chapter five, I found that more educated people have more favorable impressions of polls and polling organizations that rely on scientific polling practices. More educated people have more favorable impressions of academic research center polls and polling organizations such as Gallup. I did not find a statistically significant relationship between education and impressions of media polls. But I found that more highly educated individuals have less favorable impressions of polls conducted by political parties. It is possible that people with higher levels of education might be cynical of party polls because of their potential bias.

In chapter six, I looked at how citizens' impressions of polling organizations and polls fit into the larger model of how they perceive polls. I examined how their impressions of polls and polling organizations affect whether they pay attention to polls in their own political thinking and whether they think that government should pay attention to polls when making important political decisions for the nation. I found that individuals with more favorable impressions of polling organizations are more likely to pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments. But I found that only citizens' favorable impressions of polls conducted by nonprofit organizations and foundations affected their belief that government should pay attention to polls when making decisions for the nation. Future research should examine why citizens with favorable impressions of polls might make a distinction between their using polling information and their belief that government should use polling information to make political decisions.

In chapter six, I found that there are several additional factors that affect whether an individual pays attention to polls when making political decisions or believes that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. Individuals who do not think that their fellow Americans can form sound political judgments about the laws and regulations debated before Congress do not pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions. In addition, people who are not confident in the political judgments of their fellow Americans do not believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. I posited that this too is about credibility; if the opinions represented in poll results are not credible, then poll results are not useful cues for citizens and government to use.

Individuals with higher levels of education also do not pay attention to polls when making their own political decisions. Moreover, they do not think that government should pay attention to polls when making important decisions for the country. Better educated people, just as those who are not confident about the political judgments of their fellow Americans, do not find polling information credible. I believe that better educated people do not place a great deal of trust in the opinions of their fellow Americans because they may believe that the average American either doesn't know enough about politics and public policy or cannot analyze issues sufficiently to be able to express meaningful opinions to representatives. I proposed that better educated people and people with little confidence in the public's political judgments might be more inclined to support a trustee model of representation where elected officials rely on their own knowledge and conscience to make decisions for their constituents and not on majority opinion.

I found that decreased confidence in the collective judgments of the public was positively correlated with the belief that government officials should use their own knowledge and judgment and negatively correlated with the belief that government should follow the majority. In addition, I found that decreased confidence in the judgments of the public was also negatively correlated with the idea that the views of the majority of Americans *should* influence the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington. I believe that these findings offer some evidence to support that claim that citizens with little or no confidence in their fellow citizens' ability to make sound political judgments are not supportive of the delegate model of representation and are more supportive of a trustee model of representation.

Better educated people also do not believe that when making important decisions, government should pay attention to members of the public who contact them about the issue. I believe that these findings support the claim that people with higher levels of education do not support the delegate model of representation. I suggested the possibility that better educated people might believe that government should pay attention to other outlets for mass and elite opinion, rather than public opinion polls. People with higher levels of education might believe for instance that government should pay attention to people with greater expertise in an area of public policy. However, I found that higher levels of education were not correlated with the belief that government should pay attention to policy experts.

In chapter six, I found that decreased confidence in the collective's political judgments is negatively correlated with the belief that when making important decisions,

government should pay attention to members of the public who contact them about the issue. This also lends support to the claim that people with little confidence in the political judgments of their fellow citizens do not support the delegate model of representation. Using the additional measure of which model of representation people support, I found mixed results, just as when I examined how education affected support for the trustee model. More research needs to be done to determine whether framing is important here. It is possible that when given the option between the two models of representation, more educated people and people with little confidence in the judgments of their fellow Americans support the trustee model of representation. But when not forced to choose between the two models, they support neither to any great extent.

In addition, I found that whether people perceive polls to be accurate reflections of public opinion does not have a statistically significant effect on whether they pay attention to polls or whether they believe that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. But I noted that we need to ask respondents more detailed questions about their perceptions of polls to adequately understand what affects their perceptions of the accuracy of polls. I believe that framing will be really important here. If an individual does not believe that scientific polls are valid ways of measuring public opinion, then framing a poll as “unscientific” or “here’s what people like you who called us thought” might make it seem more accurate. Further research should focus on how framing polls affects different people’s perceptions of polls

In addition, I found in chapter six that Democrats do pay attention to polls when forming their own political judgments. But I did not find that Democrats are more likely

to believe that government should pay attention to polls. I believe that polls serve as a useful information shortcut for Democrats, if they find the opinions represented in polls credible. Democrats do not see the media as biased against them as Republicans do and are therefore more willing to accept polling information presented in the media as credible. Any perceptions of media bias they do perceive is likely offset by their perceptions that polls are beneficial to their political party. Future research should test this claim however. Future research on how partisans might perceive polling information in the media should include several survey questions to measure how respondents perceive polling information from specific media outlets. I believe that we might find that Republicans are more willing to accept polling information from Fox News and other more conservative media outlets as credible.

I did not find a statistically significant relationship between ideology and whether an individual pays attention to polls or believes that government should pay attention to polls when making political decisions. I believe that while conservatives see the media as biased against them, they too might be more willing to accept as credible polling information from a media source they trust. But it is also likely that there are some people who identify themselves as ideologically conservative and who rely less on science and more upon spirituality in their day-to-day lives. Future research should examine how citizens' trust of science affects their perceptions of public opinion polls, especially those framed as "scientific." I believe that individuals who do not trust science and who rely more on a faith-based view of the world will not find scientific polls

credible and may be more willing to believe that polls framed as “unscientific” are more credible.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are a numbers of future projects that could help us better understand how people perceive and use polling information. As I suggested earlier, one area of research should examine whether the methodology of a poll affects how people perceive the information contained within it. In other words, are some people more willing to pay attention to unscientific polls when forming political judgments? This research might help us to better understand the effects of media framing of polls and poll results. Does the media’s use of the terms “scientific” or “unscientific” when referring to a poll or survey affect how it is perceived by citizens? Does the media frame polls and surveys as “random” and do they explain what this means? If people do not understand how or do not believe that using a random sample to generalize to a population is a legitimate way to gauge public opinion, then these various frames will likely affect the credibility that people assign to polls they encounter. Therefore, using these frames might affect how different people perceive the same information.

I suggested that an individuals’ general view of the world, whether he or she relies more upon a faith-based view or a science-based view of the world, might explain which frame is more persuasive. Future research might examine how citizens’ overall perceptions of science affect their perceptions of polling information. People who do not trust science might be more inclined to pay attention to a poll framed as “unscientific” and ignore those framed as “scientific.” A measure of religiosity might also be used to

determine whether people who rely more upon their faith in their daily lives are more skeptical of polls framed as “scientific.”

In chapter four, I hypothesized that whether people believe in the validity of scientific survey methodology depends partially upon their education. I found that education, as it was measured in the Pew survey, did not explain variation in the belief that scientific polls are a valid way to measure public opinion. It is likely that this is because it is not just education, but specialized education that explains why people may or may not believe that scientific survey methodology is valid. For instance, people who have received education or training in statistics, biology, or information processing might be better able to understand how random samples might be generalized to a population. Therefore, future research should include some measure of specialized education or training to determine whether it helps to explain whether citizens believe scientific or unscientific polling methodology is a more valid way to gauge public opinion.

If some citizens believe that polls using scientific survey methodology are not valid ways of measuring public opinion, are they more likely to believe that call-in or other self-selection polls can accurately reflect the views of the larger population? Are conservatives and people who do not read the newspaper more likely to be persuaded by unscientific polls, for instance? This is one area where how framing polls may affect how citizens perceive them. If an individual believes that unscientific polls are a more valid way to measure public opinion, simply framing a poll as “unscientific” or “here’s what people like you thought” might make them more willing to accept the polling

information as accurate. They might be more willing to incorporate it into their own political judgments and want the government to pay attention to it as well.

Moreover, since liberals and people who read the newspaper are more likely to believe that polls using scientific polling methodology are valid ways of measuring public opinion, they are more likely to be persuaded by scientific polls. Obviously the persuasiveness of scientific polls also depends on question wording, question ordering, and other methodological concerns we might have about polls. However, one implication of these findings is that because some people are more likely to believe in the “science” of polls, they may be more willing to incorporate polling information from scientific polls into their own political decision making process. They might also believe that government should pay attention to scientific polls when making decisions for the nation. Because these people believe in the validity of scientific polling methodology, they might be more skeptical of unscientific polls. They might not be persuaded by these call-in and other self-selection polls. Therefore, framing these polls as “unscientific” might result in their ignoring the information contained in the poll results. They might be less susceptible to manipulation through the use of bogus polls.

Whether citizens perceive scientific polls or unscientific polls as more accurate is also important to our understanding of how they expect government to use polls when making political decisions for the nation. It may be that an individual supports a delegate model of representation, but he or she does not believe that polling methodology is sound. His or her perceptions of scientific and unscientific polling methodology might help us to understand under what circumstances he or she believes that government

should pay attention to polls when making political decisions for the nation. When asked whether they believe that government should pay attention to what polls say Americans think about a particular policy issue, citizens might have different media reports about polls at the “top of the head.”

Following Zaller’s (1992) general reasoning, which poll is most salient will likely have a large effect upon their answers. If they have recently seen Gallup Poll results reported in the *New York Times*, including details about the poll as well as information about subsamples of the population to which they can relate, they might be more supportive of the government paying attention to poll results, taking into account all of the other factors that might affect their perception of the credibility of the Gallup Poll and the *New York Times*. But suppose citizens who believe that using scientific polls is a valid way to measure public opinion have recently been exposed to the following poll about whether a Philadelphia restaurant owner should be allowed to require his customers order in English.

Lou Dobbs of CNN’s *Lou Dobbs Tonight* informed his viewers that Geno’s is being charged with discrimination and that Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations “has filed a complaint, charging the restaurant with denying service on the basis of national origin.” After some commentary on the commission’s action, Dobbs asked viewers to respond to his nightly poll.

That brings us to the subject of our poll tonight. Do you believe that Geno's Steaks sign asking customers to order in English is the owner's right or is it discriminatory? Please cast your vote at LouDobbs.com. We'll have the results and a lot more of your thoughts, at least some of your thoughts, right after this quick break. Stay with us.

After the break, Dobbs offered the results of the poll.

The results of our poll tonight. Good news for you, Geno in Philadelphia: 96 percent of this audience responding to our poll says the Geno's Steaks sign asking customers to order in English is the owner's right. Four percent of you, out of some misbegotten sense of political correctness, consider it discriminatory. We'll talk about that later (Lou Dobbs Tonight, June 13, 2006).

After viewing this, citizens who are more trusting of scientific polls might not be at all inclined to support the idea that government should pay attention to polls. In addition to the fact that it is a self-selection poll, Dobbs presents these poll results in a very biased way. Therefore, there might be many citizens who support a delegate model of representation, but their distrust of how polls are conducted and reported might convince them that government should ignore polls reported in the media. Better conformity to AAPOR standards by the media might help citizens become better consumers of polls. Moreover, reporting about polls that rely on scientific survey methodology might give the media more opportunities to present valuable information to citizens about what their fellow citizens are thinking. If the news media avoids reporting self-selection polls as if they can be generalized to the population and if members of the media attempt to avoid biased reporting of poll results, the American public might view polls as more credible and as even valuable cues that they and their elected leaders might use when making political decisions.

References

- Achen, Christopher. 1975. "Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response." *American Political Science Review* 69: 1218-1231.
- Achen, Christopher. 1983. "Towards Theories of Data: The State of Political Methodology." In Ada Finifther (Ed.) *Political Science The State of the Discipline*. Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association.
- Alvarez, R. Michael and John Brehm. 2002. *Hard Choices, Easy Answers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). 1986. *Code of Professional Ethics and Practices*. www.aapor.org.
- Aquilino, William S. 1994. "Interview Mode Effects in Surveys of Drug and Alcohol Use." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 58: 210-240.
- Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Atkin, Charles K. and James Gaudino. 1984. "The Impact of Polling on the Mass Media." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 472: 119-188.
- Barone, Michael. 1997. "Polls are Part of the Air Politicians Breathe." *Public Perspective* 9: 1-2.
- Berinsky, Adam. 1999. "The Two Faces of Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 43, 4: 1209-1230.
- Bishop, George F., Robert W. Oldendick, and Alfred J. Tuchfarber. 1984. "What Must My Interest in Politics Be if I Just Told You 'I don't know'?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 48: 210-19.
- Bogart, Leo. 1971. *Silent Politics*. New York, NY: Wiley-Interscience.
- Bradburn, Norman and Seymour Sudman. 1988. *Polls and Surveys*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brodie, M., L. Ferraro Parmelee, A. Brackett, and D. Altman. 2001. "Polling and Democracy." *Public Perspectives Magazine* July/August, 2001: 10-14.

- Brody, Richard A. 1991. *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cable News Network. 2005. "Hurricane Wilma's Aftermath; Interview With Slade Gorton." *Lou Dobbs Tonight*. October 25, 2005.
- Cable News Network. 2006 "President Makes Surprise Visit to Baghdad, Backs Iraqi Prime Minister; Iraqi Government to Launch Big Security Sweep in Baghdad; Bush's Offensive; Indiana Congressman has an Immigration Plan; Talk Radio Hosts Discuss Illegal Immigration." *Lou Dobbs Tonight*. June 13, 2006.
- Cable News Network. 2006. "Insurgents Strike in Iraq While Massive Security Sweep is Underway; President Bush Announced Details of Plan to Bolster Government in Baghdad; Government Audit Finds FEMA May Have Handed Out \$1 billion for Improper or Fraudulent Claims After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; New Boss For Iraqi Branch of al Qaeda?; William Caldwell Interview; Administration May Be Muzzling Top Climate Researchers; Condoleezza Rice Proves She Has Followers; Bush's Aide Leaves To Attend Harvard." *The Situation Room*. June 14, 2006.
- Cantril, Albert. 1991. *The Opinion Connection: Polling, Politics, and the Press*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Carmines, Edward G. and James H. Kuklinski. 1990. "Incentives, Opportunities, and Logic of Public Opinion in American Political Representation." In J.A. Ferejohn and J.H. Kuklinski (Eds.) *Information and Democratic Processes*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Chong, Dennis. 1996. "Creating Common Frames of Reference on Political Issues." In Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman, and Richard A. Brody (Eds.) *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Converse, Jean M. 1987. *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press.
- Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In D. Apter (Ed.) *Ideology and Discontent*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Converse, Philip E. 1970. "Attitudes and Nonattitudes: Continuation of a Dialogue." In Edward R. Tufte (Ed.) *The Quantitative Analysis of Social Problems*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Converse, Philip E. and Gregory B. Markus. 1979. "Plus ca Change: The New CPS Election Study Panel." *American Political Science Review* 73: 32-49.
- Cooper, Christopher and Lilliard E. Richardson, Jr. 2006. "Institutions and Representational Roles in American State Legislature." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 6, 2: 174-194.
- Crespi, Irving. 1980. "Polls as Journalism." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44: 462-476.
- Dalton, Russell J., Paul A. Beck, and Robert Huckfeldt. 1998. "Partisan Cues and the Media: Information Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election." *American Political Science Review* 92,1: 111-126.
- Dean, Gillian and Thomas Moran. 1977. "Measuring Mass Political Attitudes: Change and Unreliability." *Political Methodology* 4: 383-413.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Demers, David P. and Suzanne Nichols. 1987. *Precision Journalism: A Practical Guide*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Elving, Ronald D. 1989. "Proliferation of Opinion Data Sparks Debate Over Use." *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 19 August: 2187-2192.
- Erikson, Robert. 1979. "The SRC Panel Data and Mass Political Attitudes." *British Journal of Political Science* 9: 89-114.
- Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. 1995. *American Public Opinion*. Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster.
- Feldman, Stanley. 1989. "Measuring Issue Preferences: The Problem of Response Instability." *Political Analysis* 1: 25-60.
- Feldman, Stanley and John Zaller. 1992 "Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State." *American Journal of Political Science* 36: 268-307.
- Finnegan, Michael. 2005. "Voters Dislike 3 of Governor's Ballot Measures." *Los Angeles Times* November 2, 2005.

- Fiorina, Morris P., Paul E. Peterson, D. Stephen Voss, and Bertram Johnson. 2006. *America's New Democracy*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Fiske, Susan and Shelley Taylor. 1991. *Social Cognition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Fitzgerald, Michael R., Patra Rule, and Claudia Bryant. 1998. "Polls, Politics, and the TV News: A Longitudinal Study of the Use of Public Opinion Polling on the Evening News Broadcast." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Boston, MA.
- Gallup, George and Saul Forbes Rae. 1940. *The Pulse of Democracy: The Public Opinion Poll and How it Works*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Gfroerer, J.C. and A.L. Hughes. 1991. "The Feasibility of Collecting Drug Abuse Data by Telephone." *Public Health Reports* 106: 384-393.
- Ginsberg, Benjamin. 1989. "How Polling Transforms Public Opinion." In M. Margolis and G. Mauser (Eds.) *Manipulating Public Opinion*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole Publishing.
- Goyder, John. 1986. "Surveys on Surveys: Limitation and Potentialities." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, 1: 27-41.
- Greenfield, Thomas K., Lorraine T. Midanik, and J. D. Rogers. 2000. "Effects of Telephone Versus Face-to-Face Interview Modes on Reports of Alcohol Consumption." *Addiction* 95, 2: 227-284.
- Grieco, Elizabeth M. and Rachel C. Cassidy. 2001. "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: Census 2000 Brief." U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration. U.S. Census Bureau.
- Grofman, Bernard and Barbara Norrander. 1990. "Efficient Use of Reference Group Cues in a Single Dimension." *Public Choice* 64: 213-217.
- Groves, Robert M. 1977. "An Empirical Comparison of Two Telephone Designs." Unpublished report of the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, MI.
- Groves, Robert M. and Robert L. Kahn. 1979. *Surveys by Telephone*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

- Groves, Robert M. and Lars E. Lyberg. 1988. "An Overview of Nonresponse Issues in Telephone Surveys." In R.N. Groves, P.P. Biemer, L.E. Lyberg, J.T. Massey, W.L. Nicholls II, J. Wakesberg (Eds). *Telephone Survey Methodology*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Gujarati, Damodar. 1999. *Essentials of Econometrics*. Boston, MA: Irwin McGraw-Hill.
- Gunther, Albert. 1992. "Biased Press or Biased Public? Attitudes Toward Media Coverage of Social Groups." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56: 147-167.
- Gunther, Albert and Cindy Christen. 2002. "Projection or Persuasive Press? Contrary Effects of Personal Opinion and Perceived News Coverage on Estimates of Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication* 177-194.
- Gunther, Albert and Kathleen Schmitt. 2002. "Mapping Boundaries of the Hostile Media Effect." *Journal of Communication* 54, 1: 55-70.
- Gunther, Albert, Cindy T. Christen, Janice L. Leibhart, and Stella C. Chia. 2001. "Congenial Public, Contrary Press, and Biased Estimates of the Climate of Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65: 295-320.
- Herbst, Susan. 1993. *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Holbrook, Allyson L., Melanie C. Green, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2003. "Telephone Versus Face-to-Face Interviewing of National Probability Samples With Long Questionnaires." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67: 79-125.
- Hoaland, Carl I., Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelly. 1953. *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1999. "Pollwatch: The Media's Reporting and Distorting of Public Opinion Toward Entitlements."
- Jefferson, Thomas. 1776. *The Declaration of Independence*. In S. Kernell and G. Jacobson. 2006. *The Logic of American Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Joslyn, Mark. 1997. "The Public Nature of Personal Opinion: The Impact of Collective Sentiment on Individual Appraisal." *Political Behavior* 10, 4: 337-363.

- Jou, J., J. Shanteau, and R.J. Harris. 1996. "An Information Processing View of Framing Effects: The Role of Causal Schemas in Decision Making." *Memory and Cognition* 24: 1-5.
- Kernell, Samuel and Gary Jacobson. 2006. *The Logic of American Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Key, V.O. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Klecka, W.R. and Alfred J. Tuchfarber. 1978. "Random Digit Dialing: A Comparison to Personal Surveys." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42: 105-114.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1988. "The Role of Attitude Importance in Social Evaluation: A Study of Policy Preferences, Presidential Candidate Evaluations, and Voting Behavior." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55: 196-210.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1990. "Government Policy and Citizen Passion: A Study of Issue Publics in Contemporary America." *Political Behavior* 12: 59-92.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1991. "Response Strategies for Coping with the Cognitive Demands Attitude Measures in Surveys." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 5: 213-236.
- Krosnik, Jon A. and Matthew K. Berent. 1993. "Comparisons of Party Identification and Policy Preferences: The Impact of Survey Question Format." *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 941-964.
- Krosnick, Jon A. and Michael Milburn. 1990. "Psychological Determinants of Political Opinionation." *Social Cognition* 8: 49-72.
- Krouse, Richard W. 1982. "Polarchy and Participation: The Changing Democratic Theory of Robert Dahl." *American Political Science Review* 71: 1070-1096.
- Kuklinski, James H. and Richard C. Elling. 1977. "Representational Role, Constituency Opinion, and Legislative Roll-Call Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 21, 1: 135-147.
- Kuklinski, James H. and Paul J. Quirk. "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion." In A. Lupia, M. McCubbins, and S. Popkin (Eds.) *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ladd, Everett Carl and John Benson. 1992. "The Growth of News Polls in American Politics." In T.E. Mann and G.R. Orren (Eds.) *Media Polls in American Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings.

- Larson, Stephanie. G. 2003. "Misunderstanding Margin of Error: Network News Coverage of Polls During the 2000 General Election." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8, 1: 66-80.
- Lau, Richard R. and David O. Sears. 1986. "Social Cognition and Political Cognition: The Past, the Present, and the Future." In Richard R. Lau and David O. Sears (Eds.) *Political Cognition: The 19th Annual Carnegie Symposium on Cognition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lavrakas, Paul J. 1991. "Introduction." In P.J. Lavrakas and J.K. Holley (Eds). *Polling and Presidential Coverage*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lavrakas, Paul J. and Michael Traugott. 2000. "Election Polling in the Twenty-first Century: Challenges and Opportunities." In P. Lavrakas and M. Traugott (Eds.) *Election Polls, The News Media, and Democracy*. New York, NY: Chatham House.
- Lippmann, Walter 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1925. *The Phantom Public*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace.
- Lupia, Arthur. 1992. "Busy Voters, Agenda Control, and the Power of Information." *American Political Science Review* 86, 2: 390-403.
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88, 1: 63-76.
- Lupia, Arthur. 2002. "Who Can Persuade Whom? Implications from the Nexus of Psychology and Rational Choice Theory." In James A. Kuklinski (Ed). *Thinking About Political Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lupia, Arthur and Mathew McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Markus, Gregory. 1982. "Political Attitudes During and Election Year: A Report on the 1980 NES Panel Study." *American Political Science Review* 76, 3: 538-560.
- McCrone, Donald J. and James H. Kuklinski. 1979. "The Delegate Theory of Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 23, 2: 278-300.
- Miller, Joanne M. and Jon A. Krosnick. 1998. "The Impact of Candidate Name Order on Election Outcomes." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62: 291-330.

- Miller, M. Mark and Robert Hurd. 1982. "Conformity to AAPOR Standards in Newspaper Reporting of Public Opinion Polls." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 46, 2: 243-249.
- Miller, Warren E. and Donald E. Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57: 45-56.
- Mondak, Jeffrey. 1993. "Public Opinion and Heuristic Processing of Source Cues." *Political Behavior* 15, 2: 167-192.
- Mosier, Nancy and Andrew Ahlgren. 1981. "Credibility of Precision Journalism." *Journalism Quarterly* 58: 375-81.
- Mueller, John. 1973. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Mulry-Liggan, M.H. 1983. "A Comparison of a Random Digit Dialing Survey and the Current Population Survey." *Proceeding of the American Statistical Association, Section on Survey Research Methods*. Washington, D.C. American Statistical Association: 214-219.
- Mutz, Diana C. 1992. "Impersonal Influence: Effects of Representations of Public Opinion on Political Attitudes." *Political Behavior* 14, 2: 89-122.
- Mutz, Diana C. 1998. *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagourney, Adam and Sheryl Gay Stolberg. 2006. "Some Democrats Are Sensing Missed Opportunities." *The New York Times* February 8, 2006. Section A, 2: 1.
- National Broadcasting Co. Inc. 2005. "Many Americans Feel Economy is in Poor Shape." *NBC Nightly News*: November 4, 2005.
- Nisbett, Richard E. and Lee Ross. 1980. *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. 1974. "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication* 24: 43-51.
- O'Neill, Harry W. 1996. "Respondent Cooperation and Industry Image Survey." A Report by the Council for Marketing and Opinion Research.
- Paletz, David L., Jonathan Y. Short, Helen Baker, Barbara Cookman Campbell, Richard J. Cooper, and Rochelle M. Oeslander. 1980. "Polls in the media: Content, Credibility, and consequences." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44: 495-513.

- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 1998a. "Conservative Opinions Not Underestimated, but Racial Hostility Missed: Opinion Poll Experiment Reveals. Survey Methodology." <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=590>.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 1998b. "Conservative Opinions Not Underestimated, but Racial Hostility Missed: Opinion Poll Experiment Reveals. Introduction and Summary." <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=94>.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 1998c. "Conservative Opinions Not Underestimated, but Racial Hostility Missed: Opinion Poll Experiment Reveals. Questionnaire." <http://people-press.org/reports/print.php3?PageID=591>.
- Popkin, Samuel. 1994. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- PSRA/Kaiser/Public Perspective Poll #2001-POL15A. Polling and Democracy. The Roper Center, University of Connecticut, 2001.
- Rendall, Steve. 2004. "Fox vs. CNN: Rating the Cable News Ratings." *The Business Journal Online* April, 2004. <http://www.business-journal.com>.
- Riker, William H. and Peter Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *American Political Science Review* 62: 25-42.
- Rippey, John N. 1980. "Use of Polls as a Reporting Tool." *Journalism Quarterly* 57, 4: 642-46.
- Rokeach, Milton. 1973. *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press.
- Roper, Burns W. 1983. "Some Things That Concern Me." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47: 303-09.
- Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 2003. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Rosenthal, Alan. 1998. *The Decline of Representative Democracy*. Washington, D.C. Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Safire, William. 1975. "The Press is the Enemy: Nixon and the Media." *New York Magazine* January 27: 41-50.
- Salwen, Michael B. 1985. "The Reporting of Public Opinion Polls During Presidential Years, 1968-1984." *Journalism Quarterly* 62: 272-77.

- Salwen, Michael B. 1987. "Credibility of Newspaper Opinion Polls: Source, Source Intent, and Precision." *Journalism Quarterly* 64: 813-19.
- Schuman, Howard and Jean M. Converse. 1971. "The Effects of Black and White Interviewers on Black Responses in 1968." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 35,1: 44-68.
- Schuman, Howard and Stanley Presser. 1980. *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording and Context*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Schuman, Howard and Jacqueline Scott. 1987. "Problems in the Use of Survey Questions to Measure Public Opinion." *Science* 236: 957-959.
- Shanks, J. Merrill, Maria Sanchez, and Betsy Morton. 1983. "Alternative Approaches to Survey Data Collection for the National Election Studies: A Report on the 1982 NES Method Comparison Project." Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- Sniderman, Paul, Richard Brody and Philip Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sobel, Joel. 1985. "A Theory of Credibility." *Review of Economic Studies* 52: 557-73.
- Tourangeau, Roger and Kenneth Rasinski. 1988. "Cognitive Processes Underlying Context Effects in Attitude Measurement." *Psychological Bulletin* 103: 299-314.
- Tourangeau, Roger, Kenneth Rasinski, Norman Bradburn and Roy D'Andrade. 1989. "Carryover Effects in Attitude Surveys." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53: 495-524.
- Traugott, Michael. 2004. "Do Polls Give the Public a Voice in Democracy?" In Michael Genovese and Matthew J. Streb (Eds.), *Polls and Politics*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Traugott, Michael. 1992. "The 'Deliberative Opinion Poll' is a Well-Intentioned but Flawed Idea." *Public Perspective* 3,1: 27-29.
- Traugott, Michael. 1991. "Public Attitudes about News Organizations, Campaign Coverage, and Polls." In P. Lavrakas and J. Holley, (Eds.). *Polling and Presidential Election Coverage*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Traugott, Michael and Mee-Eun Kang. 2000. "Public Attention to Polls in an Election Year. In M. Traugott and P. Lavrakas (Eds.) *Election Polls, the News Media, and Democracy*. New York, NY: Chatham House Publishers.
- Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman. 1982. "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice." In Robin Hogarth (Ed.) *Question Framing and Response Consistency*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- United States Census Bureau. 2006. "2005 American Community Survey Data Profile Highlights." <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>.
- Vallone, Robert, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1985. "The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perception and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49: 577-88.
- Wahlke, John C., Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan, and Leroy C. Ferguson. 1962. *The Legislative System: Explorations in Legislative Behavior*. New York, NY: John Riley and Sons.
- Weeks, Michael F., Robert A. Kulka, Judith T. Lessler, and R.W. Whitmore. 1983. "Personal Versus Telephone Surveys for Collecting Household Health Data at the Local Level." *American Journal of Public Health* 73: 1389-1394.
- Weiss, Carol and Eleanor Singer. 1988. *Reporting of Social Science in the Media*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Wolfinger, Raymond E. and Steven J. Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Zaller, John R. 1984. "Toward a Theory of the Survey Response." Paper Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36, 3: 579-616.
- Zipp, John F. and Joann Toth. 2002. "He Said, She Said, They Said: The Impact of Spousal Presence in Survey Research." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66, 2: 177-208.

Appendix

Additional Information

Chapter Four Description of Pew Survey Methodology

There were several methodological differences between the two surveys. The “standard” survey was conducted June 18-22, 1997. The “rigorous” survey was conducted June 18-August 12, 1997. At least five attempts were made to complete an interview with respondents in the standard survey sample. There was no limit on the number of call-backs made to respondents in the rigorous survey sample. Respondents were contacted until an interview was completed. In addition, respondents in the rigorous survey sample who refused or who ended an interview before it was completed were contacted up three more times by telephone to complete the interview (if the respondent’s address was available, a letter was sent before the third call). Respondents in the standard survey sample who refused or who broke off the interview before it was complete were contacted at least one more time by telephone. Next, respondents in the rigorous survey sample were randomly selected from each household. Those in the standard survey sample were chosen by interviewers asking to speak to the youngest male 18 or older who is at home. If no eligible male was available, interviewers asked to speak to the youngest female 18 or older who is at home. Quotas of 50% male and 50% females were chosen for the standard survey sample. Finally, the biggest difference between the two samples was that individuals in the rigorous survey sample were, if their addresses were obtained, sent an advance letter with a \$2 bill enclosed as incentive to complete the interview (Pew, 1998a).

Appendix

Chapter Four Probabilities

Table A.1. Probability of Respondent (Very Conservative and Reads the Newspaper) Believing Random Sample

variable name	Coefficient	value	coefficient * value
Constant	-.198	1	-.198
Ideology	-.125	5	-.625
Education	.008	3	.024
Newspaper	.247	1	.247
Television news	-.038	0	0.00
Income	-.021	4	-.084
Age	-.006	45	-.270
Race	.048	1	.048
Gender	.051	1	.051
Home Ownership	-.050	1	-.050
<hr/>			
$X\beta = -.857$	Probability = .298		
$X\beta = -1.104$	Probability = .249	if neither newspaper nor television news use	

Table A.2. Probability of Respondent (Conservative and Reads the Newspaper) Believing Random Sample

variable name	coefficient	value	coefficient * value
Constant	-.198	1	-.198
Ideology	-.125	4	-.500
Education	.008	3	.024
Newspaper	.247	1	.247
Television news	-.038	0	0.00
Income	-.021	4	-.084
Age	-.006	45	-.270
Race	.048	1	.048
Gender	.051	1	.051
Home Ownership	-.050	1	-.050
<hr/>			
$X\beta = -.732$	Probability = .325		
$X\beta = -.979$	Probability = .273	if neither newspaper nor television use	

Appendix

Table A.3. Probability of Respondent (Moderate and Reads the Newspaper) Believing Random Sample

variable name	coefficient	value	coefficient * value
Constant	-.198	1	-.198
Ideology	-.125	3	-.375
Education	.008	3	.024
Newspaper	.247	1	.247
Television news	-.038	0	0.00
Income	-.021	4	-.084
Age	-.006	45	-.270
Race	.048	1	.048
Gender	.051	1	.051
Home Ownership	-.050	1	-.050
<hr/>			
Xβ=	-.607	Probability = .353	
Xβ=	-.854	Probability = .299	if neither newspaper nor television use

Table A.4. Probability of Respondent (Liberal and Reads the Newspaper) Believing Random Sample

variable name	coefficient	value	coefficient * value
Constant	-.198	1	-.198
Ideology	-.125	2	-.250
Education	.008	3	.024
Newspaper	.247	1	.247
Television news	-.038	0	0.00
Income	-.021	4	-.084
Age	-.006	45	-.270
Race	.048	1	.048
Gender	.051	1	.051
Home Ownership	-.050	1	-.050
<hr/>			
Xβ=	-.482	Probability = .382	
Xβ=	-.729	Probability = .325	if neither newspaper nor television use

Appendix

Table A.5. Probability of Respondent (Very Liberal and Reads the Newspaper) Believing Random Sample

variable name	coefficient	value	coefficient * value
Constant	-.198	1	-.198
Ideology	-.125	1	-.125
Education	.008	3	.024
Newspaper	.247	1	.247
Television news	-.038	0	0.00
Income	-.021	4	-.084
Age	-.006	45	-.270
Race	.048	1	.048
Gender	.051	1	.051
Home Ownership	-.050	1	-.050
<hr/>			
Xβ= -.357	Probability = .412		
Xβ= -.604	Probability = .353 if neither newspaper nor television use		

Chapter Four Tests for Multicollinearity: Auxiliary Regressions

To test for multicollinearity, I ran auxiliary regressions using my four main variables. Following Gujarati (1999), I regressed each of these explanatory variable on the other explanatory variables. The following tables summarize the results of these auxiliary regressions.

Table A.6. Dependent Variable = ideology

ideology	coef.	std. err.	t	p > t
education	-.0026	.0191	-.130	.893
newspaper	.0816	.0383	2.13	.033
tvnews	.0727	.0398	1.83	.067
cons	3.1223	.0612	50.99	.000

$R^2 = .004$

Appendix

Table A.7. Dependent Variable = education

education	coef.	std. err.	t	p > t
ideology	-.0027	.0202	-.130	.893
newspaper	.3389	.0388	8.73	.000
tvnews	-.0290	.0408	-.71	.477
cons	2.685	.0716	37.51	.000

$R^2 = .029$

Table A.8. Dependent Variable = newspaper

newspaper	coef.	std. err.	t	p > t
ideology	.0429	.025	1.174	.087
education	.0522	.023	2.254	.025
tvnews	.1880	.051	3.672	.000
cons	.0612	.107	.571	.569

$R^2 = .051$

Table A.9. Dependent Variable = television news

tv news	coef.	std. err.	t	p > t
ideology	.0241	.024	1.021	.308
education	-.0159	.022	-.729	.466
newspaper	.1660	.045	3.672	.000
cons	.5730	.097	5.913	.000

$R^2 = .036$