

## HARD CHOICES, EASY ANSWERS

Values, Information, and American Public Opinion

R. MICHAEL ALVAREZ AND JOHN BREHM

Those who seek to accurately gauge public opinion must first ask themselves: Why are certain opinions highly volatile while others are relatively fixed? Why are some surveys affected by question wording or communicative medium (e.g., telephone) while others seem immune? In *Hard Choices, Easy Answers*, R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm develop a new theory of response variability that, by reconciling the strengths and weaknesses of the standard approaches, will help pollsters and scholars alike better resolve such perennial problems. Working within the context of U.S. public opinion, they contend that the answers Americans give rest on a variegated structure of political predispositions—diverse but widely shared values, beliefs, expectations, and evaluations.

Alvarez and Brehm argue that respondents deploy what they know about politics (often little) to think in terms of what they value and believe. Working with sophisticated statistical models, they offer a unique analysis of not just what a respondent is likely to choose, but also how variable those choices would be under differing circumstances. American public opinion can be characterized in one of three forms of variability, conclude the authors: ambivalence, equivocation, and uncertainty. Respondents are sometimes ambivalent, as in attitudes toward abortion or euthanasia. They are often equivocal, as in views about the scope of government. But most often, they are uncertain, sure of what they value, but unsure how to use those values in political choices.

R. MICHAEL ALVAREZ is Professor of Political Science at the California Institute of

Technology and the author of *Information and Elections*. JOHN BREHM is Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *The Phantom Respondents* and the coauthor of *Working, Shirked, and Sabotage*.

For more information on the statistical data used in this book, consult [www.pupress.princeton.edu/alvarez](http://www.pupress.princeton.edu/alvarez)

"*Hard Choices, Easy Answers* offers a strikingly original and rigorous theory of public opinion built upon the interaction between psychological predispositions and political information. In addition to providing a refined portrait of the electorate's policy preferences, Alvarez and Brehm compare elites and masses, distinguish between individual and collective opinion, develop methods to interpret the variability of opinions, and draw lessons for theories of political representation—a total package that significantly advances our understanding of attitude formation, belief systems, and survey responses."

—Dennis Chong, *Northwestern University*

"*Hard Choices, Easy Answers* is a very attractive book that has taught me a good deal. It treats numerous topics in public opinion research, but the underlying theme is the wavering in people's minds when they are asked their political views. Anyone concerned with these topics will have to consult the studies included here. This book—whose authors are smart, prominent, productive scholars—will draw considerable attention."

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# Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion

**VM Jensen**



## **Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion:**

**Hard Choices, Easy Answers** R. Michael Alvarez, John Brehm, 2020-10-06 Those who seek to accurately gauge public opinion must first ask themselves Why are certain opinions highly volatile while others are relatively fixed Why are some surveys affected by question wording or communicative medium e g telephone while others seem immune In *Hard Choices Easy Answers* R Michael Alvarez and John Brehm develop a new theory of response variability that by reconciling the strengths and weaknesses of the standard approaches will help pollsters and scholars alike better resolve such perennial problems Working within the context of U S public opinion they contend that the answers Americans give rest on a variegated structure of political predispositions diverse but widely shared values beliefs expectations and evaluations Alvarez and Brehm argue that respondents deploy what they know about politics often little to think in terms of what they value and believe Working with sophisticated statistical models they offer a unique analysis of not just what a respondent is likely to choose but also how variable those choices would be under differing circumstances American public opinion can be characterized in one of three forms of variability conclude the authors ambivalence equivocation and uncertainty Respondents are sometimes ambivalent as in attitudes toward abortion or euthanasia They are often equivocal as in views about the scope of government But most often they are uncertain sure of what they value but unsure how to use those values in political choices

**American Public Opinion** Robert S. Erikson, Kent L. Tedin, 2019-03-13 Providing an in depth analysis of public opinion including its origins in political socialization its role in the electoral process and the impact of the media *American Public Opinion* goes beyond a simple presentation of data to include a critical analysis of the role of public opinion in American democracy New to the Tenth Edition Updates all data through the 2016 elections and includes early polling through 2018 Pays increased attention to polarization Adds a new focus on public opinion and immigration Covers new voting patterns related to race ethnicity and gender Reviews public opinion developments on health care Expands coverage of political misinformation media bias and negativity especially in social media Defends political polling even in the wake of 2016 failings

**The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media** Robert Y. Shapiro, Lawrence R. Jacobs, 2011-05-19 Public opinion and the media form the foundation of the United States representative democracy They are the subject of enormous scrutiny by scholars pundits and ordinary citizens This *Oxford Handbook* takes on the big questions about public opinion and the media both empirical and normative focusing on current debates and social scientific research Bringing together the thinking of a team of leading academic experts its chapters provide a cutting assessment of contemporary research on public opinion the media and their interconnections Emphasizing changes in the mass media and communications technology the vast number of cable channels websites and blogs and the new social media which are changing how news about political life is collected and conveyed they describe the evolving information interdependence of the media and public opinion In addition the volume reviews the wide range of influences on public opinion including the

processes by which information communicated through the media can affect the public It describes what has been learned from the latest research in psychology genetics and studies of the impact of gender race and ethnicity economic status education and sophistication religion and generational change on a wide range of political attitudes and perceptions The Handbook includes extensive discussion of how public opinion and mass media coverage are studied through survey research and increasingly through experiments using the latest technological advances The Oxford Handbooks of American Politics are a set of reference books offering authoritative and engaging critical overviews of the state of scholarship on American politics Each volume focuses on a particular aspect of the field The project is under the General Editorship of George C Edwards III and distinguished specialists in their respective fields edit each volume The Handbooks aim not just to report on the discipline but also to shape it as scholars critically assess the scholarship on a topic and propose directions in which it needs to move The series is an indispensable reference for anyone working in American politics **Handbook on Politics**

**and Public Opinion** Rudolph, Thomas J., 2022-08-18 Examining the nature of public opinion in democratic societies this Handbook succinctly illustrates the importance of public opinion as an instrument of popular control and democratic accountability Expert contributors in the field provide a thorough review of a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of this timely topic **Negative Liberty** Darren W. Davis, 2007-03-02 Did America's democratic convictions change forever after the terrorist attacks of September 11 In the wake of 9/11 many pundits predicted that Americans' new and profound anxiety would usher in an era of political acquiescence Fear it was claimed would drive the public to rally around the president and tolerate diminished civil liberties in exchange for security Political scientist Darren Davis challenges this conventional wisdom in Negative Liberty revealing a surprising story of how September 11 affected Americans' views on civil liberties and security Drawing on a unique series of original public opinion surveys conducted in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and over the subsequent three years Negative Liberty documents the rapid shifts in Americans' opinions regarding the tradeoff between liberty and security at a time when the threat of terrorism made the conflict between these values particularly stark Theories on the psychology of threat predicted that people would cope with threats by focusing on survival and reaffirming their loyalty to their communities and indeed Davis found that Americans were initially supportive of government efforts to prevent terrorist attacks by rolling back certain civil liberties Democrats and independents under a heightened sense of threat became more conservative after 9/11 and trust in government reached its highest level since the Kennedy administration But while ideological divisions were initially muted this silence did not represent capitulation on the part of civil libertarians Subsequent surveys in the years after the attacks revealed that while citizens' perceptions of threat remained acute trust in the government declined dramatically in response to the perceived failures of the administration's foreign and domestic security policies Indeed those Americans who reported the greatest anxiety about terrorism were the most likely to lose confidence in the government in the years after 2001 As a result

ideological unity proved short lived and support for civil liberties revived among the public Negative Liberty demonstrates that in the absence of faith in government even extreme threats to national security are not enough to persuade Americans to concede their civil liberties permanently The September 11 attacks created an unprecedented conflict between liberty and security testing Americans devotion to democratic norms Through lucid analysis of concrete survey data Negative Liberty sheds light on how citizens of a democracy balance these competing values in a time of crisis      *Reflections on 1989 in Eastern Europe* Terry Cox,2013-09-13 This book presents a selection of recent research on the events and developments of 1989 in Eastern Europe It offers a mix of detailed examinations of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe thoughtful and considered appraisals of developments and middle range theoretical discussions of patterns of cause and effect The authors range in their approaches from detailed examinations of government and ruling party papers from the archives some of it originally labelled top secret to personal observations and oral history based on interviews with participants to analysis of survey data and official statistics In their chosen focus the essays range from explorations of the emerging crisis in the communist regimes that led to the events of 1989 reflections and insights into the events and changing mood during 1989 itself and examinations of some of the consequences and legacies of 1989 This book was published as a special issue of *Europe Asia Studies*      *Political Persuasion* Thomas E. Nelson,2024-11-05 This book examines the tactics of value recruitment through case studies in educational and environmental politics By presenting interviews with activists and policymakers and numerous novel experiments Thomas E Nelson demonstrates the strategy behind value recruitment and how it shapes our political attitudes      **The Feeling, Thinking Citizen** Howard Lavine,Charles S. Taber,2018-03-13 This book is an appreciation of the long and illustrious career of Milton Lodge Having begun his academic life as a Kremlinologist in the 1960s Milton Lodge radically shifted gears to become one of the most influential scholars of the past half century working at the intersection of psychology and political science In borrowing and refashioning concepts from cognitive psychology social cognition and neuroscience his work has led to wholesale transformations in the way political scientists understand the mass political mind as well as the nature and quality of democratic citizenship In this collection Lodge s collaborators and colleagues describe how his work has influenced their own careers and how his insights have been synthesized into the bloodstream of contemporary political psychology The volume includes personal reflections from Lodge s longstanding collaborators as well as original research papers from leading figures in political psychology who have drawn inspiration from the Lodgean oeuvre Reflecting on his multi faceted contribution to the study of political psychology *The Feeling Thinking Citizen* illustrates the centrality of Lodge s work in constructing a psychologically plausible model of the democratic citizen      **Exchanging Symbols** Anitra Nettleton,Mathias Alubafi Fubah,2020-03-27 This book comprises eight essays that consider the politics and polemics of monuments in Africa in the wake of the RhodesMustFall movement in 2015 The removal of the Rhodes statue from UCT main campus is the pivot on which the discussion of monuments as heritage in

South Africa turns It raised a number of questions about the implementation of heritage policy and the unequal deployment of memorials in the South African and other postcolonial landscapes The essays in this volume are written by authors coming from different backgrounds and different disciplines They address different aspects of this event and its aftermath offering some intensive critique of existing monuments analysing the successes of new initiatives meditating on the visual resonances of all monuments and attempting to map ways of moving forward **New Faces, New Voices** Marisa A. Abrajano, R.

Michael Alvarez, 2012-03-25 A comprehensive look at Hispanic voters in the United States Making up 14.2 percent of the American population Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States Clearly securing the Hispanic vote is more important to political parties than ever before Yet despite the current size of the Hispanic population is there a clear Hispanic politics Who are Hispanic voters What are their political preferences and attitudes and why The first comprehensive study of Hispanic voters in the United States *New Faces New Voices* paints a complex portrait of this diverse and growing population Examining race politics and comparative political behavior Marisa Abrajano and R Michael Alvarez counter the preconceived notion of Hispanic voters as one homogenous group The authors discuss the concept of Hispanic political identity taking into account the ethnic generational and linguistic distinctions within the Hispanic population They compare Hispanic registration turnout and participation to those of non Hispanics consider the socioeconomic factors contributing to Hispanics levels of political knowledge determine what segment of the Hispanic population votes in federal elections and explore the prospects for political relationships among Hispanics and non Hispanics Finally the authors look at Hispanic opinions on social and economic issues factoring in whether these attitudes are affected by generational status and ethnicity A unique and nuanced perspective on the Hispanic electoral population *New Faces New Voices* is essential for understanding the political characteristics of the largest and fastest growing group of minority voters in the United States *Framing Inequality* Matt Guardino, 2019-02-01

Neoliberal policy approaches have swept over the American political economy in recent decades In *Framing Inequality* Matt Guardino focuses on the power of corporate news media in shaping how the public understands the pivotal policy debates of this period Drawing on a wide range of empirical evidence from the dawn of the Reagan era into the Trump administration he explains how profit pressures and commercial imperatives in the media have narrowed and trivialized news coverage and influenced public attitudes in the process Guardino highlights how the political economic structure of mainstream media operates to magnify some political messages and to mute or shut out others He contends that news framing of policies that contribute to economic inequality has been unequal and that this has undermined Americans opportunities to express their views on an equal basis *Framing Inequality* is a unique study that offers critical understanding of not only how neoliberalism succeeded as a political project but also how Americans might begin to build a more democratic and egalitarian media system **The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior** Jan E. Leighley, 2012-02-16

The Oxford Handbooks of American Politics are the essential guide to the study of American

political life in the 21st Century With engaging contributions from the major figures in the field The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior provides the key point of reference for anyone working in American Politics today

*The Politics of Sex* Susan B. Hansen, 2014-05-16 The American cultural landscape has shifted considerably since the 1990s As church attendance has declined seculars have increased in number and in political involvement The economy was supposed to be the most important issue in the 2008 and 2012 elections but social issues such as gay rights and the status of women actually had a greater impact on vote choice Moral issues and perceptions of candidate morality had less effect on voters in 2004 than in 2008 These arguments directly challenge the conventional wisdom concerning the 2004 and 2008 elections which were supposedly decided on the basis of moral values and the economy respectively Yet in *The Politics of Sex* Susan B Hansen justifies these claims theoretically based on evidence about how voters actually evaluate candidates Hansen explores trends in public opinion on abortion gay rights and the status of women and finds that values voters are still crucial in presidential elections even those supposedly fought over economic or foreign policy issues She then analyzes campaign strategies and vote choice to show how Barack Obama made effective use of the liberal trends in public opinion on social issues in 2008 and 2012 Hansen also examines trends in demographics religious involvement the institutional setting and public opinion to predict who in future years benefit from the politics of sex By providing an historical perspective on the changing impact of morality politics on presidential elections this book will show how and why the politics of sex now favors the Democratic Party

**Citizens' Reactions to European Integration Compared** Elizabeth Frazer, Florence Haegel, Virginie Van Ingelgom, 2013-01-17 Pre financial crisis EU citizens were overlooking Europe ignoring it in favour of globalisation economic flows and crises of political corruption Innovative focus group methods allow an analysis of citizens reactions and demonstrate how euroscepticism is a red herring instead articulating an indifference to and ambivalence about Europe

*Abortion Politics in Congress* Scott H. Ainsworth, Thad E. Hall, 2010-12-13 This book examines how legislators have juggled their passions over abortion with standard congressional procedures looking at how both external factors such as public opinion and internal factors such as the ideological composition of committees and party systems shape the development of abortion policy Driven by both theoretical and empirical concerns Scott H Ainsworth and Thad E Hall present a simple formal model of strategic incrementalism illustrating that legislators often have incentives to alter policy incrementally They then examine the sponsorship of abortion related proposals as well as their committee referral and find that a wide range of Democratic and Republican legislators repeatedly offer abortion related proposals designed to alter abortion policy incrementally *Abortion Politics in Congress* reveals that abortion debates have permeated a wide range of issues and that a wide range of legislators and a large number of committees address abortion

**Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration** Catherine E. De Vries, 2018 The European Union EU is facing one of the rockiest periods in its existence No time in its history has it looked so economically fragile so unsecure about how to protect its borders so

divided over how to tackle the crisis of legitimacy facing its institutions and so under assault of Eurosceptic parties The unprecedented levels of integration in recent decades have led to increased public contestation yet at the same the EU is more reliant on public support for its continued legitimacy than ever before This book examines the role of public opinion in the European integration process It develops a novel theory of public opinion that stresses the deep interconnectedness between people's views about European and national politics and suggests that public opinion cannot simply be characterized as either Eurosceptic or not but rather consists of different types This is important because these types coincide with fundamentally different views about the way the EU should be reformed and which policy priorities should be pursued These types also have very different consequences for behaviour in elections and referenda Euroscepticism is such a diverse phenomenon because the Eurozone crisis has exacerbated the structural imbalances within the EU As the economic and political fates of member states diverged people's experiences with and evaluations of the EU and national political systems also grew further apart The heterogeneity in public preferences that this book has uncovered makes a one size fits all approach to addressing Euroscepticism unlikely to be successful **Coping with Complexity** Dani Marinova, 2016-07-31

When parties undergo abrupt organisational changes between elections such as when they fuse split join or abandon party lists they alter profoundly the organisation and supply of electoral information to voters The alternatives on the ballot are no longer fixed but need to be actively sought out instead This book examines how voters cope with the complexity triggered by party instability Breaking with previous literature it suggests that voters are versatile and ingenious decision makers They adapt to informational complexity with a set of cognitively less costly heuristics uniquely suited to the challenges they face A closer look at the impact of party instability on the vote advances and qualifies quintessential theories of vote choice including proximity voting direction intensity appeals economic voting and the use of cognitive heuristics The rich and nuanced findings illustrate that political parties hold a key to understanding voter behaviour and representation in modern democracy **Presidential Campaigns, Slogans, Issues, and Platforms** Robert North Roberts, Scott John

Hammond, Valerie A. Sulfaro, 2012-06-12 The book provides a comprehensive discussion of the major issues and events surrounding all American presidential elections from the earliest years of the Republic through the campaign of 2008 **Presidential Campaigns Slogans Issues and Platforms** The Complete Encyclopedia is an easy to use reference work designed to encourage students and anyone interested in democratic politics to undertake a greater understanding of this complex aspect of American political life The three volume work covers each presidential campaign in depth examining a large number of related issues ranging from the use of social media in modern presidential campaigns to negative campaign ads and key slogans used in every presidential campaign Volume One contains entries offering specific and focused information on issues trends factors slogans strategies and other more detailed elements of presidential campaigning from the first stirrings of the American democratic process to the first decade of the 21st century Volumes Two and Three provide



chronological accounts of every presidential campaign since the ratification of the Constitution through the campaign of 2008 with Volume Two covering the campaign of 1788-89 to the campaign of 1908 and Volume Three covering the campaign of 1912 to the campaign of 2008

**The Psychology of Media and Politics** George Comstock, Erica Scharrer, 2005-05-31

Research indicates that people discount their own opinions and experiences in favor of those of experts as espoused in the media. The framing of news coverage thus has a profound impact on public opinion and political decision making as a response to public outcry. However, the choice of how to frame the news is typically made to solicit viewership and high ratings rather than to convey accurate and meaningful information. The Psychology of Media and Politics discusses why people discount their own opinions, how the media shapes the news when this drives political decision making, and what the effect is on the future of society. Issues addressed include: How powerful are the media in shaping political beliefs and judgment? How has this power changed in recent years? How does media influence voting behavior? To what extent do media opinions affect political decision making? Demonstrates the ways in which the media both constrain and facilitate democratic participation. Provides insight into why individuals have varying levels of attention to and interest in politics. Discusses such issues as political advertising, polls, debates, and journalists' pursuit of scandal. Describes why only some Americans turn out to vote in prominent elections. Offers a model of personal versus social level influences that extends beyond politics into other important topic areas. Brings together research and theories from the fields of Communication Psychology and Political Science. Reviews hundreds of key sources, both historical and contemporary.

Anti-Americanisms in World Politics Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, 2011-06-15

Anti-Americanism has been the subject of much commentary but little serious research. In response, Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane have assembled a distinguished group of experts, including historians, polling data analysts, political scientists, anthropologists, and sociologists, to explore anti-Americanism in depth using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The result is a book that probes deeply a central aspect of world politics that is frequently noted yet rarely understood. Katzenstein and Keohane identify several quite different anti-Americanisms: liberal, social, sovereign, nationalist, and radical. Some forms of anti-Americanism respond merely to what the United States does and could change when U.S. policies change. Other forms are reactions to what the United States is and involve greater bias and distrust. The complexity of anti-Americanism, they argue, reflects the cultural and political complexities of American society. The analysis in this book leads to a surprising discovery: there are as many ways to be anti-American as there are ways to be American.

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