

# Online-Appendix

## The Role of Public Opinion Research in the Democratic Process: Insights from Politicians, Journalists, and the General Public

*Table A.1* Comparison of the beliefs regarding sources to which public officials pay attention (party differences between politicians)

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Own knowledge	3.47	3.43	3.58
Their conscience	3.32	3.13	3.12
Lobbyists	3.16	3.45	3.55
Campaign contributors	3.1	3.36	3.47
Journalists	2.82	2.79	2.95
Policy experts	3.21	3.02	3.13
Members of the public	3.07	2.85	2.99
Polls	3.03	3.17	3.09
(n)	73	129	77

*Note.* The table displays means. Response categories: 1 “not at all” 2 “not too much” 3 “a fair amount” 4 “a great deal”

Data sources: Studies 4, Kaiser 2001 (Politicians)

*Table A.2* Different ways policymakers can learn what the public wants (party differences between politicians)

	Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	Rating	Ranking	Rating	Ranking	Rating	Ranking
Holding a town meeting	3.25	44.9	3.19	26.4	3.21	35.7
Conducting a public opinion poll	2.97	40.6	3.26	54.5	3.16	54.3
Talking to people at shopping malls or on the street	2.77	7.2	2.74	13.2	2.75	4.3
Talking to people who call, write, or e-mail	2.86	7.2	2.86	5.8	2.78	5.7
(n)	73	69	129	121	77	77

*Note.* Response categories: Rating: 1 “not at all good” 2 “not too good” 3 “somewhat good” 4 “very good”; Ranking: Best way in %

Data sources: Studies 4, Kaiser 2001 (Politicians)



*Table A.3* Perception of Poll by the Three Groups (mean)

	Public	Journalists	Politicians
“The questions asked in polls often don’t give people the opportunity to say what they really think about an issue.”	3.29	3.41	3.49
“Public opinion polling is based on sound scientific practices.”	2.52	3.26	3.09
(n)	1,206	301	300

*Note.* Response categories: 1 “strongly disagree” 2 “somewhat disagree” 3 “somewhat agree” 4 “strongly agree”

Data sources: Studies 2 to 4, Kaiser 2001 (General Population, Expert Samples Journalists and Politicians)

*Table A.4* Different ways policymakers can learn what the public wants

	Form A: pay attention	Rank
Town meeting	3.18	1
Talking to people who call, write an email	2.89	2
Conducting public opinion polls	2.82	3
Talking to people at their doorsteps or on the street	2.78	4
Reading public opinion polls	2.68	5
Interacting on social media (Facebook or Twitter)	2.45	6
(n)	1011	

*Note.* Response categories: 1 “not at all good” 2 “not too good” 3 “somewhat good” 4 “very good”

Data source: Kantar 2013 (General Population), (n = 1,011)

#### **Exact Question wording:**

“There are different ways elected and government officials could try to learn what the majority of people in our country think about important issues such as...

- Hold town meetings
- Conducting public opinion polls
- Reading public opinion polls
- Talking to people at their doorsteps or on the street
- Talking to people call, write or email the official’s office
- Interacting with the public via social media such as Facebook or Twitter

Is it a very good, somewhat good, not too good, or not at all good way to learn what the majority of people in our country think?”

*Table A.5* “Overall, do you feel that those individuals who are in positions to make decisions for the country mostly see things the ways the public does, mostly see things differently?”

Mostly see things the way the public does	Mostly see things differently than the public	Unsure
15%	78%	7%

Data source: McClatchy-Marist 2017 (General Population), (n=1,062)

*Table A.6* “How much do you trust public opinion polls: A great deal, a good amount, not very much, not at all?”

A great deal	A good amount	Not very much	Not at all	Unsure
7%	29%	39%	22%	4%

Data source: McClatchy-Marist 2017 (General Population), (n=1,062)

## Question Wordings

### Gallup – Public (Study 1)

#### Attention to polling (3 questions)

*Question 1.* “In your own opinion, do political officeholders and public officials pay too much attention to the polls, or not enough attention to the polls?” (too much, not enough)

*Question 2.* “In your own opinion, do President Clinton and administration officials pay too much attention to the polls, or not enough attention to the polls?” (too much, not enough)

*Question 3.* “In your own opinion, would the country be better off if there were more attention paid to polls than now or less attention paid to polls than now?” (more, less)

#### Survey value (2 items, alpha: .570)

“Do you feel polls give you a better understand of the news of the day, or not?”

“Do you think these pre-election polls show who is ahead and who is behind in election races are a good thing for the nation or are a bad thing for the nation?”

## **Kaiser – Public (Study 2), Journalists (Study 3), and Politicians (Study 4)**

*\* indicates that the question was not asked in the journalist and politician studies*

### **Attention to polling (experiment).**

*Form A.* “Generally speaking, when elected government officials in Washington make decisions about important issues, how much attention do you feel they actually pay to (Insert) A great deal, a fair amount, not too much or none at all?”

- Their own knowledge on the issue
- Their conscience or judgment, that is, what they think is the right thing to do
- Policy experts involved with the issue
- Members of the public who contact them about the same issue
- Their campaign contributors
- Public opinion polls
- Lobbyists and special interest groups
- What journalists say about the issue

*\*Form B.* “Generally speaking, when elected 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?”

- Their own knowledge on the issue
- Their conscience or judgment, that is, what they think is the right thing to do
- Policy experts involved with the issue
- Members of the public who contact them about the same issue
- Their campaign contributors
- Public opinion polls
- Lobbyists and special interest groups
- What journalists say about the issue

## Preferences of the public

**Rating.** “There are different ways elected and government officials could try to learn what the majority of people in our country think about important issues. Is (Insert) a very good, somewhat good, not too good or not at all good way to learn what the majority of people in our country think?”

- Holding town hall meetings
- Conducting a public opinion poll
- Talking to people at shopping malls and on the street
- Talking to people who call, write or e-mail the official’s office

**Ranking.** “Just to be certain I understand your opinion, please tell me which one of the following you think is the best way for officials to learn what the majority of people in our country think about important issues.”

- Holding town hall meetings
- Conducting a public opinion poll
- Talking to people at shopping malls and on the street
- Talking to people who call, write or e-mail the official’s office

## Survey value (3 items; alpha: .671 in Study 2)

“Do you agree or disagree that ...?”

- \*Answering questions in opinion polls about social and political issues is a waste of time.
- \*Polls on social and political issues serve a useful purpose.
- Public opinion polling is far from perfect, but it is one of the best means we have for communicating what the public is thinking.

*Response categories:* Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree