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## Review of *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*

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whenever possible, bridges the gap between the thematic discussion and current events.

The concluding chapter explores the future of comparative politics in the context of globalization. As in the preceding thematic chapters, Lim reprises the debate on globalization, defines the relevant concepts, and links the processes of globalization to the rational, cultural, and structural research approaches. The focus on globalization also represents one of the most significant discussions in the entire book, with far-reaching implications for the current and future state of comparative politics. If time and space become more condensed and the forces of globalization contribute to the gradual erosion of economic, political, social, and cultural differences among countries, the study of comparative politics, at some point, would become irrelevant. However, is this argument convincing? As pointed out by Lim and other comparativists, existing forms of differences among countries remain visible, and new ones are likely to emerge, thereby creating a fertile ground for the study of comparative politics to thrive and endure.

Together with the conclusion, the chapters represent a well-balanced synthesis of theories, practices, and current issues in comparative politics. For practitioners, the book provides helpful insights on the successful teaching of comparative politics. Its best use will be as a theoretical and practical guide for students who are at the beginning of their comparative politics journey.

ANTON E. WOHLERS  
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## GENERAL

Saris, Willem E., and Paul M. Sniderman, eds.

### **Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change**

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press  
384 pp., \$29.95, ISBN 0-691-09254-0  
Publication Date: July 2004

The editors of this book are Willem E. Saris, professor of political science at the

University of Amsterdam and teacher at the ESADE business school of Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, and Paul M. Sniderman, Fairleigh S. Dickinson Jr. Professor of Public Policy and professor of political science at Stanford University. In *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*, they have brought together a collection of research that deals with the problems that consistently seem to plague public opinion research. The book, which is accessible to those with a keen interest in, and understanding of, public opinion research, is designed to examine the problems of “nonattitudes” and the role of political sophistication, as well as the ways in which the task environment affects the behavior of respondents.

Part 1, “A Synoptic Perspective,” lays the groundwork for a view of public opinion that is dependent upon both political sophistication and the task environment. Van der Veld and Saris counter the argument of Phillip Converse—who says that nonattitudes are widespread among average citizens—by putting forth a theory of public opinion that shows citizens with some stable attitudes, attitudes that are variable in different task environments and different situations. By recognizing the effects of the task environment, the authors provide a break from “classical” notions of public opinion.

Part 2, “The Problem of Ambivalence,” includes two contrasting works, one of which finds high levels of ambivalence in the public, with the other one finding little to no evidence of ambivalence among average citizens. Meffert, Guge, and Lodge come to the conclusion that ambivalence is as mundane in public opinion research as it is in politics; thus, from this perspective, ambivalence is simply a part of American society and politics. Part 3 examines “Politics and Nonattitudes.” In this section, the familiar concept of issue framing is covered, with Sniderman and Theriault finding that low-information respondents are most susceptible to framing effects. Similarly, Zaller presents information that suggests low-information voters are most influenced by the specific policy discussions and arguments of particular elections; this finding certainly has practical implications in the realm of politics.

Part 4, “Attitude Strength and Attitude Stability,” includes research that looks at the impacts of policy importance and its interaction with respondents’ knowledge of the policy area, research that finds low stability of opinions and relatively high levels of learning among respondents, and research that seems to support Converse’s notion of opinion crystallization. In the notion of opinion crystallization, different types of respondents clearly have different levels of stability in their opinion formations. The most important conclusion here is that although respondents with low information are the most ambivalent, they are also the most likely to learn from public opinion surveys; Sniderman and Bullock draw on this finding in the concluding chapter of the book.

Part 5, “An Alternative to the Standard Opinion Poll,” and Part 6, “Looking Forward,” examine the potential of the “choice questionnaire” and a hypothesis of “menu dependence,” respectively. The choice questionnaire, an alternative to the standard public opinion poll, offers the respondent response options that realistically portray the viable policy options within a policy area. Thus, the respondent is able to choose either those options with which he or she is already familiar or those that are new and potentially in line with that person’s policy preferences. Sniderman and Bullock conclude the book with a hypothesis of menu dependence, telling us that, according to the various findings within this edited work, the choice questionnaire is the mode in which public opinion researchers should conduct their work.

*Studies in Public Opinion* contains a collection of contributions to the field of public opinion research that are on the cutting edge of this type of political science. Although some of the cases the authors choose to examine are quite novel, the findings and conclusions of the authors are quite positive and optimistic, insofar as the authors’ outlooks on the future of public opinion research and citizens’ abilities to respond to opinion polls in a meaningful way.

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