

Reference Guide to the Study of Public Opinion



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The study of public opinion has been undertaken by students in a variety of fields, such as history, sociology, psychology, social psychology, journalism, advertising, and politics. Numerous methods of approach and techniques have been employed, and points of view with reference to the scope, content, and objectives of such a study have differed. The body of information relating to the subject has now reached such proportions that it seems desirable

to attempt a tentative classification of it. A survey of the entire field of investigation will suggest not only the multiplicity of interest-objectives, but also the fact that certain phases have received a disproportionate amount of attention, and other aspects almost none. The fact that the study of public opinion has been undertaken by students equipped with such a varying supply of techniques, indicates that one entering upon the study must be prepared to ignore to some extent traditional categories of academic learning and venture resolutely across more or less crystallized lines of departmental distinction. At the same time, however, it affords the adventurer an opportunity to take advantage of whatever methodological inventions may have been discovered in related fields.

The aims of an introductory study of this nature are to acquaint the student with the literature in the field, with the objectives that have enlisted the interest of students from different fields, with the more important problems that challenge investigation and solution, and with the various techniques that may be employed in treating a subject, such as this, in the arena of the social sciences. For those who may find that the study lacks finality and completeness, it is necessary to state that it is not the purpose of the course to "cover" a particular field of study in the traditional sense, but rather to open up new vistas, along which one may travel with the guidance of specialists. The farther one proceeds in the study of some particular phase of public opinion, the more necessary is the counsel of students in other fields, whether they be statisticians, sociologists, publicists, or psychologists. Students of public opinion must be prepared to go for their information where they can find it.

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