

because the authors, in addition to content analyzing the media, visited various newsrooms to talk with the journalists who covered the campaigns. The media analysis was then placed into the broader mosaic of forces composed of the candidates, their spin doctors, and the political parties pitted against the varied economic and political interests of media establishments. The careful attention paid to the rich political contexts, the solid theoretical underpinnings, and the smooth writing all contribute to making this the kind of study that appeals to practicing journalists and to politicians and their handlers, as well as to scholars across all the social sciences.

Michael S. Lewis-Beck and **Tom W. Rice.** *Forecasting Elections.* Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1992. 163 pp.

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The subject of this book—forecasting the outcomes of elections months ahead of time, without even using the results of trial heat opinion polls—seems at first to be a form of fortune-telling, and perhaps even a slur on the political process and voters' free will. Of course, political scientists are aware that most voters are consistent in their preferences, and one can make a good guess by just looking at the vote counts in the previous election. Using a little bit more information and a little bit of statistics, Lewis-Beck and Rice do a lot better in predictions, impressively showing how objective analysis of a few columns of numbers can regularly outperform pundits who use inside knowledge.

The authors devote about half of their book to U.S. presidential elections and develop most of their methodology in this context. They fit a linear regression model to nationwide electoral votes from 1948 through 1988 and come up with the following formula to predict the percentage of the electoral college vote for the incumbent party's candidate for president: $6.83 + 0.86 PP + 7.76 G + 0.52 PS + 19.66 C$, where PP = percent who approve how the president is handling his job, in July of the election year Gallup Poll; G = percentage change in real GNP from fourth quarter of the year before the election to second quarter of the election year; PS = number of House seats the president's party gained in the last election; C = support for presidential party candidate in the primaries (if candidate receives more than 60 percent of all votes cast, then scored 1 for strong support, otherwise scored 0). For example, if Bush's popularity is 30 percent this July and economic growth is 1 percent, then his predicted electoral vote total is $6.83 + 0.86(30) + 7.76(1) + 0.52(-8) + 19.66(1) = 55.9$ percent, or 301 electoral votes. Similar linear formulas are produced

to predict the number of seats in the U.S. House and Senate and the French National Assembly; table 9.3 shows the authors outperforming eight out of 10 experts in predicting the aggregate outcome of the 1990 U.S. Senate races.

The rationale for forecasting electoral vote directly, discussed on page 22, is mistaken. More accurate predictions probably could be obtained by first predicting popular vote (nationwide or state by state), and then converting, approximately or exactly, to electoral votes, using the well-known seats-votes literature.

The strengths of this book are its crystal-clear explanation of its methods, complete with tables and graphs, and the willingness to lay out predictions for public scrutiny. (The authors are surely hoping that Perot does not influence the November election.) The book's weakness is its unquestioning faith in linear regression of aggregate electoral vote totals. We should always be suspicious of any grand claims made about a linear regression with five parameters and only 11 data points; from sample size considerations alone, we should be more confident with the analysis of county or state-level analysis, such as in Rosenstone (1983).

In table 6.2 and the accompanying discussion, the authors mistakenly claim that the predictions of Rosenstone (1983) have no lead time and estimate the nationwide popular vote with a standard error of 4.5 percent. Actually, Rosenstone makes predictions with a 4-month lead time (equal to Lewis-Beck and Rice's), and the 4.5 percent is the standard error of statewide popular vote predictions; the average error in his nationwide predictions is under 2 percent, which clearly outperforms the simpler method presented here.

In addition, Lewis-Beck and Rice are sometimes too hasty in dismissing other, less methodical ideas that have been used in forecasting. For example, a county or state is typically a "bellwether" because its partisan preferences (but not necessarily its demographics) mirror the nation's as a whole, not just "primarily from chance," as the authors suggest on page 5. Furthermore, it is too much to ask any method existing or imaginable to predict accurately very close elections such as 1960 and 1976, and so it is not quite fair to criticize a bellwether for failing in these cases.

As Lewis-Beck and Rice (and also Rosenstone [1983]) point out, the fact that U.S. elections can be successfully forecast with little effort, months ahead of time, has serious implications for our understanding of politics. In the short term, improved predictions will lead to more sophisticated campaigns, focusing more than ever on winnable races and marginal states. Organizations that deal with government policy will be able to plan more realistically past the next election. A final conclusion is perhaps of most interest to political scientists. In recent years, commentators have taken the wide swings in preelection public opinion polls as evidence that voters are swayed by shallow appeals and clever short-term tactics such as sound bites and political advertis-

ing. Paradoxically, the regular predictability of election returns suggests that voting decisions are, in the words of Lewis-Beck and Rice, "reasonable evaluation of issues before selecting an alternative." We can thank the authors of this book for providing a clear demonstration of election forecasting in theory and practice.

Reference

Rosenstone, Steven 1983 *Forecasting Presidential Elections* New Haven, CT Yale University Press.

Ronald H. Hinckley. *People, Polls, and Policymakers: American Public Opinion and National Security*. New York: Lexington Books, 1992. 157 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

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Students of international relations and foreign policy have had their worlds shaken by the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, major changes in eastern and western Europe, the legacy of the Gulf War, and other recent events. If these transformations are not enough, add to them Hinckley's urging that they start paying attention to public opinion: that it is now simply unavoidable that foreign policymakers and scholars have to grapple with "what the public thinks and why the public thinks that way" (p. 129). Hinckley observes that public opinions influence in executive and legislative foreign policy-making is growing, and since it does not appear possible to reverse this, the new "intellectual and political challenges for foreign policymakers are to come to grips with this actuality and direct it in a positive and beneficial course" (p. 140).

This is the last thing that most foreign policy analysts want to hear: classic studies of foreign policy and international relations have argued that the public is neither attentive nor capable enough to provide constructive input into foreign policy-making. This is not so. Based on his analysis of a substantial amount of data, Hinckley describes public opinion as "reasonable, responsive, responsible, skeptical, wary, firm, sensible, communicative, cost conscious, sophisticated, nonideological, measured, and understanding of intricacies and complexities" (p. 131). The public is quite capable, even though it does not have continually at its disposal a hefty bank of facts and detailed information about foreign policy, for which it is heavily dependent on the mass media, political leaders, and other elites.

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