

What shapes public opinion(s)?

Department of Political Science and Government
Aarhus University

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Outline

- Cognitive Interviews
- Discuss new material

Cognitive Interviews

- Form groups of 4 people
- Each person present their experiences
- Discuss
- Synthesize

Synthesis

- How difficult is it to write opinion questions?
- How well do people understand opinion questions?
- What kind of opinion formating/reporting processes do people use?
- How much should we trust surveys? And how much should we trust peoples' opinion self-reports?

Context

- Dahl: People know their own interests
- Downs: Rational decision making
- Mansbridge: Anticipatory representation invites manipulation

Where do opinions come from?

- Stable constraints
 - Evolution
 - Genetics/biology
 - Personality
 - Ideology and values
- Social environment

Social influences on opinion

- Adolescent socialization
- Social networks
- Mass media

Perspectives on media influence

- Hypodermic effects
- Direct effects
- Minimal effects
- Something else?

Methods of media influence

- Persuasion (or coercion)
- Learning
- Agenda-setting
- Priming
- Framing

Discussion

- Does evidence of media influence mean citizens' are irrational, manipulable, or unaware of their interests?
- By contrast, what are the benefits of media influence for citizens' decision making?

Heuristics

- Heuristics are decision-making shortcuts
- Downs: Heuristics help people be rational by minimizing effort
- Lau and Redlawsk: Party, ideology, endorsements, viability, appearance
- Deservingness heuristic means general opinions are primed by social experiences

Discussion

- Under what conditions can we trust peoples' opinions?

