



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Bandwagon without a band

Irwin, G.A.

Citation

Irwin, G. A. (2006). Bandwagon without a band. In . Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4483>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4483>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Prof. Galen A. Irwin Ph.D.

Bandwagon without a band



Universiteit Leiden



*Circus Posters Collection. (TC093) Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.
Princeton University Library. Reprinted with permission*

Bandwagon without a band

Rede uitgesproken door

Prof. Galen A. Irwin Ph.D.

ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als

hoogleraar Politicologie met nadruk op methoden
en technieken van sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek

aan de Universiteit Leiden

gehouden op 23 mei 2006



Universiteit Leiden

Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus, zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders,

In the 35 years that I have worked at this university, I do not believe that a single national election has gone by without some journalist calling me to ask the question: “Do opinion polls influence voters?” Invariably the question is posed with some concern, either in the words or in the tone of voice. It is never voiced in a positive sense, never: “Isn’t it wonderful that voters pay attention to the campaign and follow the polls?” It is not even asked in an objective fashion, simply a matter of curiosity or of professional interest. No, it is always with a concern that there is something wrong, that it is somehow improper if polls influence how voters make their choices. In fact, more often than not, the question of influence of the polls is followed immediately by a question concerning whether the Netherlands should follow the example of other countries and ban publication of polls, at least in the final week or weeks of the election campaign.¹

Often it is not the journalists themselves who are the source of this concern. Often they are reacting to statements made by politicians who have complained that polls are influencing the decisions of the voters. In 2003 such prominent politicians as Winnie Sorgdrager, André Rouvoet, and Thom de Graaf expressed support for voluntary or legal bans on the publication of polls, in any case during the last week before an election.² According to the *NRC Handelsblad*, even the Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, joined the chorus:

He would like to see research done on the effects of opinion polls on voters. That could result in an agreement not to conduct polls before the elections. “Then substance wins”, according to Balkenende.³

Of course, I would never oppose research into the effects of opinion polls, but according to this report, Balkenende seems already to know the results of the proposed research, since he immediately throws out the possibility of eliminating pre-election polling.

Perhaps I should just stop this lecture here, since the Prime Minister, prominent politicians, and journalists already seem to know the answer. Am I just being stubborn to say that I am far from convinced that this is the correct response to the question? Please bear with me. Perhaps I can convince you that it is worth considering the question of influence of polls more thoroughly before jumping to a conclusion.

Bandwagon effects

Two words sum up the concerns of both the journalists and politicians: “bandwagon effects”. No term dominates the discussion of the effects of public opinion polls, both in the scientific literature and in the public debate as does the bandwagon effect. Even if they are not familiar with any of the scientific literature on the topic, journalists and politicians are familiar with bandwagon effects.

It is difficult to determine the exact origin of the term, but William Safire traces its origins to usage by the most famous circus leader in 19th century United States, P.T. Barnum, who referred in 1855 to the sale of a circus “bandwagon”. When the circus came to town, the bandwagon led the parade through the streets, trying to draw crowds to the circus grounds to watch the performance. Safire notes that bandwagons were depicted in political cartoons as early as 1884 and 1896 and that “[f]rom 1902 onward the word became well established in American political terminology”, after it was used to depict of the career of Theodore Roosevelt.⁴

In terms of voting the analogy is that voters want to jump onto the bandwagon to support a winner. Even before the first public opinion polls based upon modern, scientific sampling principles were held, observers spoke of bandwagon effects for the winner. Horse-race journalism is far from new and the first reported “straw polls” in the United States were held in 1824. In the 19th century, American newspapers regularly made attempts to predict the winner of an upcoming election, at times to boost support for their preferred candidate.⁵ In a book that is as fascinating to read today as it must have been when it appeared in 1932, Claude Robinson notes that predictions about victory at an upcoming election “are of course part of the current coin of electioneering.”⁶ Politicians felt that if they could create an impression that they would win the election, it would lead to additional votes. Robinson continued:

*For purely practical purposes it is thought necessary to strain every effort to create a victorious psychology, not only to keep the campaign workers on their toes, but to attract the so-called “bandwagon” vote which prefers to back the winning side.*⁷

The picture of the “bandwagon” voter was not positive and Robinson seemed to share that view.

*There are, according to this view, a large number of voters who have no well-defined political convictions, and who swing with the tide, their chief desire being to vote with the winner. Straw polls indicate the probable victor, and thus unfairly deliver this “bandwagon” support to the majority party.*⁸

This picture of the bandwagon voter has become so ingrained in popular thinking that I suppose that it is hardly surprising that journalists and politicians maintain a negative view of

voters who are influenced by opinion polls. Such voters have no convictions and merely swing with the tide. Those holding such a view might likely agree with Robinson that it is unfair that such voters swell the ranks of the majority or winning party. Robinson wrote his evaluation before modern polling had been introduced in the United States in the 1930s by pioneers such as Archibald Crossley, Elmo Roper and George Gallup.⁹ Yet since the modern polls could lay stronger claims to accuracy than the old-fashioned straw polls, fears of undue influences on voters only increased.

One of the most vocal opponents of opinion polls in this period in the United States was Congressman Walter M. Pierce of Oregon. He defended his views in 1940 in a new academic journal entitled *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Pierce wrote:

*I am convinced that voters like to climb onto the bandwagon and that polls greatly increase the bandwagon vote.*¹⁰

*It has been said, and I think truly that one-fifth of all the voters try to pick a winner.*¹¹

A politician who believed that 20 per cent of the vote could be determined by learning the probable winner of the election from an opinion poll had good reason to fear its publication. A study of the members of the U.S. Congress published in the same year revealed Pierce was not alone in his belief in the effects of polls. Views were split fairly evenly, with 32 per cent feeling that polls influenced voting and an additional 18 per cent feeling they did so in part.¹² It might be interesting to take a cue from Prime Minister Balkenende and conduct a study among Dutch journalists and politicians to determine what their views are on the influence of polls on voters.

When the first academic studies of voting behavior appeared in

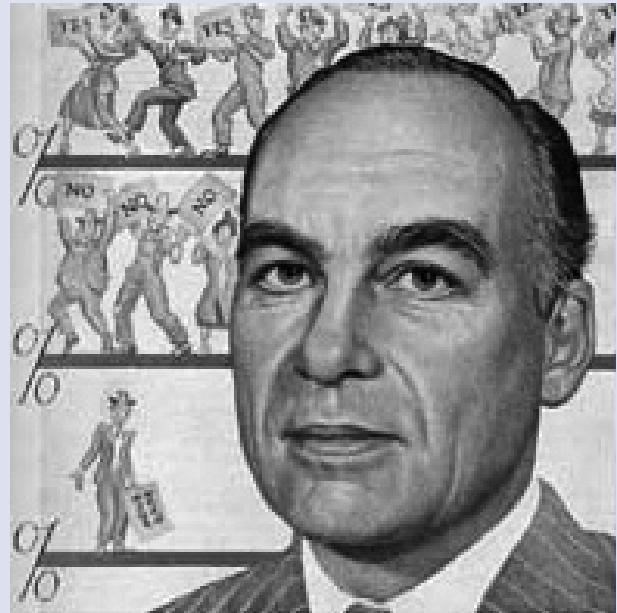
the United States in the early 1940s, an infamous quote added fuel to the negative image of the bandwagon voter. In *The People's Choice*, Lazarsfeld and his associates quote a voter in Erie County, Pennsylvania, who stated:

*Just before the election it looked like Roosevelt would win so I went with the crowd. Didn't make any difference to me who won, but I wanted to vote for the winner.*¹³

“Didn't make any difference to me who won, but I wanted to vote for the winner”. Could this voter have known that he, or she, had summed up so succinctly the essence of what is seen as the bandwagon voter? Empty headed, no interest, just off to the circus ground for some fun, just wanting to vote for the winner. This is the view that still dominates thinking about the influence of opinion polls on voters. Social psychologists often speak of differences between “affective” and “cognitive” reactions. The reaction of the bandwagon voter is an affective one, lacking cognition, just an emotional desire to associate with the winner.

George Gallup fought for years against the idea that his polls were influencing the voters. In 1965 he wrote:

*No amount of factual evidence seems to kill the bandwagon myth. Our early experience indicated no evidence of a bandwagon movement among voters in national elections – at least none that we or anyone else could either detect or measure. More often than not, the candidate who is lagging far behind does better than expected. Now, after thirty years, the volume of evidence against the bandwagon theory has reached staggering proportions, and yet many writers continue to allude to this theory as an accepted fact.*¹⁴



George Gallup

Yet, now more than 40 years later the myth still continues, as indicated in the quotes from recent Dutch elections. And despite the belief that the answer is already known, the call for more research indicates that some nagging doubts still linger and that the matter has not been settled finally.

Response to journalists

When I first began to receive calls from journalists concerning the effects of opinion polls, I often teased them by stating that they and the politicians were far more influenced by polls than voters. However, even if this is true, and I would still contend that they are more influenced than voters, it nevertheless begs the question of whether polls have effects on the voters. As far as a more direct answer to the question is concerned, I tended

to rely on statements in political handbooks or on textbook treatments of the subject. Maybe not surprisingly, these did not give a clear or conclusive picture. One handbook published in 1987 defined the bandwagon effect as:

*“the alleged influence that polls have on the outcome of an election. The existence of a bandwagon effect is controversial (...). Evidence for and against the bandwagon effect is mostly anecdotal.”*¹⁵

Nor do textbooks provide much help:

Some argue that polls that show one candidate ahead increase the incentives for supporters of the trailing candidate to change their preference and climb on board the winning candidate’s bandwagon. Others emphasize underdog effects: sympathetic voters, they claim, rally around the candidate whom the polls show to be losing.

Little strong evidence supports either of these views.¹⁶

This quote reveals that in addition to bandwagon effects, a new term had entered the discussion concerning effects of polls—underdog effects. Such effects are strongly associated with the presidential election in the United States in 1948. The polls had so overwhelmingly predicted that the incumbent, Harry Truman, would lose, that the journalists and editors of the *Chicago Tribune*, opened an early edition with the headline “Dewey Defeats Truman”. The photo of a triumphant Truman holding up a copy of the newspaper is now part of American election folklore. The explanation was that at the last moment voters had turned out to support the underdog.¹⁷



Reliance on handbook and textbook sources was never fully satisfying. Such quotes are too vague and ambiguous to inspire confidence in a response, so after passing along such platitudes for a number of elections, I decided I wanted to investigate the question more thoroughly. The first attempt that I, together with my colleague Joop van Holsteyn, made to study the influence of public opinion polls in this country related to the 1986 parliamentary elections. This was one of those elections at which the polls seemed to have gotten it wrong.¹⁸ Whereas the polls had indicated that the PvdA would emerge as the largest party, this honor unexpectedly went to the CDA and whereas the polls had indicated that the CDA-VVD coalition might well lose its majority in Parliament, it actually maintained its total of 81 seats.

De populariteit van Lubbers heeft niet geholpen

Wat er misging met het CDA

Headline from *De Tijd*, May 23, 1986

8 In the aftermath a symposium was held at the Royal Academy of Science and we contributed to the publication that emerged from it with a piece in which we attempted to estimate just how great the influence of polls might have been. Using data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study of 1986 we estimated that no more than 5 per cent of the electorate had been influenced by the polls and no more than 18 per cent could have even potentially been influenced.¹⁹ In addition, we noted also that the terms “bandwagon” and “underdog” did not seem to fit the Dutch context well. These terms have arisen in the context of a two-party system, but in a multi-party system such as the Netherlands there are more possibilities for influence. We speculated on what these might be, but several years would pass before we could expand on these ideas more fully. Meanwhile, during a research leave in 1998-1999 I decided to go beyond handbooks and textbooks and examine the original research on the topic. I spent a year in the library of the University of North Carolina attempting to find everything that had ever been written on the topic. I found 79 articles that dealt directly with the influence of polls on voters. The reason for confusion concerning polling effects became clearer. In many cases the conceptualizations of the basic terms “bandwagon” and “underdog” was shaky or unclear. There was little discussion of what psychological theory might underlie such effects. The results were often contradictory. And there was little research that had been carried out in the context of a multi-party system.

Since then, Van Holsteyn and I have devoted a substantial portion of our research time in the attempt to find a more satisfactory answer to the question of the influence of opinion polls in multi-party systems, particularly in the Netherlands. In addition to attempting to provide a better conceptualization of the effects of opinion polls, we developed a research program that culminated in the inclusion of a number of questions in the 2002 and 2003 Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies.²⁰ Time constraints make it impossible to report all of those results here today. Instead, I will concentrate on the election of 2003, because it provides a unique opportunity to investigate the effects of opinion polls on voters.

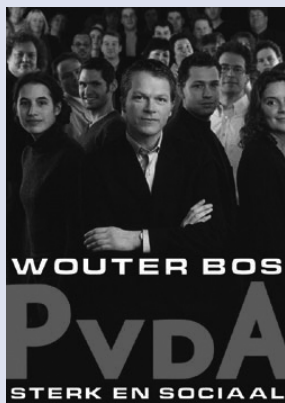
The Parliamentary election of 2003

The election in January of 2003 cannot be seen on its own, since in many respects it was an extension of the election of May the previous year. The partners of the purple coalition-PvdA, VVD and D66-had suffered dramatic losses in 2002; the PvdA fell to only 23 seats. The CDA and the new List Pim Fortuyn were the winners. The coalition that was formed of CDA, VVD, and LPF lasted only 87 days and fell on October 16. New elections were called for January 22, 2003.

During the fall, opinion polls showed that the PvdA had recovered some of its losses, but throughout November and December, the results were quite stable, varying only between 27 and 29 seats. Not even the introduction of a new party leader, Wouter Bos, in November 2002, resulted in any gains for the party.

Because of the holiday season, the first serious, major event was the television debate on Friday, January 3 on RTL4.²¹ During the first 20 hours following the debate, there was much discussion, but little consensus concerning who had won the debate. This changed on Saturday evening when RTL-News

opened with the leader "Wouter Bos strong winner of election debate; Zalm the loser".²² On Monday evening, January 6, Maurice de Hond reported in the SBS6 program *De Stem van Nederland* that the PvdA had jumped from 28 to 35 seats. This was followed two days later by a NIPO poll presented in *Vandaag* revealing that the PvdA had gained five seats.²³



From that point on, horse-race journalism centered on which party, the fast-rising PvdA or the slowly declining CDA, would emerge as largest after the election.²⁴ In our wildest dreams we could never have devised a situation that provided us a better opportunity to study the effects of polls on voters. On the one

hand, the media made polls a focus of their coverage of the campaign and on the other hand, the rapid rise of the PvdA from 29 to over 40 seats in the polls in only three weeks raises the question whether voters were jumping on the bandwagon. We can begin by noting that the Dutch voter of 2003 was quite different from the Dutch voter of earlier times. For 1986 we had estimated that only 18 per cent of the voters could potentially have been influenced by polls. By 2003 this percentage had risen dramatically to 43 per cent; it had been even higher, 48 per cent, in 2002. First, there has been a steady decline in the percentage of voters who report that they vote for the same party at each election. During the high point of the *verzuiling*, very few voters changed votes between elections. Even in 1986, just over half of the voters still reported always voting for the same party. By 2003, this number was down to 30 per cent.

Second, voters now delay the timing of the vote decision. In 1986, 70 per cent of voters reported they knew long in advance of the election for which party they would vote. By 2003, only 48 per cent said they knew long in advance, and in 2002 this had been only 40 per cent. Finally, voters in 2003 were even more aware of polls than they had been in 1986; in 2003 fully 95 per cent reported they had encountered the results of polls in the media, in 1986 this had been 85 per cent.²⁵

In 2003 we asked the respondents to indicate themselves how strongly they had been influenced by public opinion polls when making their decision concerning for whom to vote. They were quite willing and able to respond. Fourteen per cent said they had been influenced "a little" and seven per cent said they had been influenced "a lot". The total is so close to the 20 per cent figure that you can almost hear old Walter Pierce rolling over in his grave and shouting: "I told you so!" But saying you were influenced by polls does not make you a bandwagon voter, at least not as described by Pierce.

Recall that Pierce's conception of the bandwagon voter and the conception that has since prevailed is of an uncommitted, uninterested, uninformed individual who does not use his/her head to determine the vote, but just votes according to the desire to be on the side of the winner. If Dutch voters in 2003 were bandwagon voters, they should fit this negative image. Yet, when we examine the data, it becomes clear that they do not. Indicators of political interest and a desire to inform oneself on political issues are not related to whether one reported having been influenced by polls or not. Whether we take indicators of political interest in general or look at specific indicators as reading about national or international news in the newspaper or talking about politics with friends, there is no relationship. Those who were not interested were no more likely to report having been influenced by polls as those who

were interested. If we focus directly on the campaign by asking whether they followed the campaign in the newspapers or watched at least one of the debates on television, we still find no differences.²⁶

Bandwagon voters are said to be less committed to politics. It is not clear exactly how commitment should be measured. We have chosen three indicators: 1) indicating that it did not matter to the voter which coalition emerged after an election; 2) that this did not matter to the country; and 3) agreement with a set of statements intended to measure political cynicism. None of these variables is related to whether or not the respondent reported having been influenced by opinion polls.²⁷ Moreover, all of these results hold if we concentrate only on PvdA-voters.²⁸ What then is the conclusion to be drawn from this analysis? It is that we can find no bandwagon voters! Yes, there was a surge to the PvdA in January of 2003, but it was a bandwagon without a band, or at least no one was jumping on. Voters who stated they were influenced by the polls (both PvdA-voters and others) were no different from their counterparts who were not influenced, in terms of their interest, their attempts to inform themselves, or in their commitment. So it is George Gallup and not Walter Pierce who can lie peacefully in his grave. This is the newest evidence that should help bury the bandwagon myth.

So what song are they playing?

If these voters are not joining the bandwagon circus music, what song are they playing? If we bury the bandwagon myth, with what do we replace it? We still need to find an answer to the questions that the journalists and politicians continue to pose. After all, there certainly was a surge to the PvdA in January 2003 and it was definitely related to the polls. Among those voters who had voted for some other party in 2002, but switched to the PvdA in 2003, fully 44 per cent said the polls had influenced

their decision. This is almost twice the percentage (23 per cent) reported by those who had voted for the PvdA in both elections. And even this percentage was higher than that for voters who did not vote for the PvdA in either election (20 per cent). If these voters riding the surge were not bandwagon voters, what was their motivation?

Further investigation indicates that the most likely source is the difficult choice that some voters were facing. A problem facing many voters in a multi-party system such as the Netherlands is that they have only one vote to cast, whereas there may be more than one party that they would like to support. When I first came to the Netherlands in 1970, people tried to convince me that it was easier to make a vote decision here than in the United States. After all, with more offerings, it is more likely that one can find a party that closely corresponds to one's own convictions. But at that time most Dutch voters were locked into their parties of the *verzuijing*.²⁹ What was clear to me then and has become clearer to Dutch voters since then is that it is actually more difficult to make a choice. In the United States, if one does not support one party strongly, at least you may know you do not want to support the other. In the Netherlands, there may be more than one party that you would like to support, but you are not allowed to divide up your vote. You have to make a decision to vote for only one party.³⁰

In the national election studies, respondents have at times been asked to indicate how likely it was that they would vote for a party in the future. This likelihood is recorded for each party on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating a certain vote for the party in the future. If we take the values 9 and 10 as indicative of support for a party, we can examine how voters feel about the various parties. Most importantly, we can see whether voters have more than a single party that they would like to support in the future.³¹

Indeed, in 2003, one quarter of the electorate gave high scores to two or more parties. Since they cannot vote for both or all of these parties, at any specific election a choice must be made. In addition, about one fifth of the respondents gave no party a score as high as 9; these voters have no party that they feel strongly about, but they too must make a choice at the election. This means that almost half the electorate does not have a clear favorite and thus must choose between multiple parties. For such voters, we can ask whether the polls are more likely to play a role in the decision-making process.

The answer is yes. Among those who had to choose between parties, one in three said they had been influenced by the polls. Among those who had no clear favorite one in four reported that the polls had influenced their choice. For those who did have a clear favorite, only one in six said that they had been influenced by the polls.

Such findings might be criticized because they are taken from one and the same survey. Perhaps voters were simply rationalizing their decisions after the fact. However, for about half of the 2003 respondents we have additional information from responses they had given in the spring of 2002, long before the 2003 opinion poll results could have had any influence. Using these data, we can focus on the movement to the PvdA between the elections. To do this we focus on voters who in 2002 included the PvdA among their preferences for parties on the left.³² Fully 39 per cent of these voters indicated that they had been influenced by the polls in 2003. If the PvdA was the clear favorite in 2002, only 24 per cent reported in 2003 that they had been influenced by the polls. In previous research we have established that voters receive information concerning the expected results for parties at an upcoming election from the polls.³³ It seems obvious that voters in 2003 were using such information to determine which of their favorite parties needed

their support most in this election. Quite likely the discussion in the media concerning whether the PvdA would become larger than the CDA, with all of the implications for the formation of a coalition and who would deliver the Prime Minister, played a role in the decisions to be taken. Elsewhere we have demonstrated that it is not size, but the consequences of size and the possibility of joining in the new coalition, that are important in these strategic decisions that some voters make.³⁴

In addition to the extensive discussion of opinion polls in the media, the 2003 campaign was characterized by a large number of debates. In addition to the debate on January 3 that kicked off the campaign, major debates were held on January 8, 12, 14, and on the eve of the election on January 21. In addition, various programs included discussions between two or more party leaders that also had the character of a debate.³⁵ Many voters (27 per cent) indicated that the debates had influenced their vote choice in 2003. There is no relationship between watching one or more of these debates and being influenced by polls. But there is a strong relationship between being influenced by polls and being influenced by the debates. Half (52 per cent) of those who indicated their decision had been influenced by the polls also said that the debates had had an influence on their vote. Recall that it was the first debate on January 3 and not a poll that set off the surge to the PvdA.

Conclusion

Based on such findings, I have changed my response to journalists. No longer do I contend that the polls have little effect on voters or have an effect on only a few voters. There still is little evidence that voters react emotionally or affectively to polls - just jumping on the winner's bandwagon. We do not find voters who report having been influenced by the polls to be uninterested, uninformed, and uncommitted.

They are not bandwagon voters. Instead there is evidence that voters react cognitively to the polls. Polls provide information concerning the relative strength of support for political parties at a particular moment and which parties are gaining or losing when compared to the previous election or previous poll. Based heavily on this information, voters formulate expectations concerning the outcome of the election and what the consequences of the expected outcome will be. Which party will become the largest after the election; will a party fall below the electoral threshold or a threshold it has set for participation in government; and most importantly, which coalition possibilities are possible or likely? These are important strategic considerations for many voters, especially those who do not have a straightforward preference for a single party. Incorporating this information into the decision-making process is not an easy matter, but requires considerable thought. Such voters do not fit the picture of the classic bandwagon voter-uninterested, uncommitted, unconcerned. Instead, such voters are interested, committed and sufficiently concerned in order to make the effort to make such a difficult choice. Such voters should be admired by politicians and journalists, not reviled.

The answer to the follow-up question concerning whether polls should be banned is undoubtedly quite obvious from the previous conclusion. Polls provide information to voters that is useful to them in determining their vote, just as they use the information from debates and other sources to determine their vote. If you ban polls during the last week of the campaign, you might just as well ban debates, and if you do that why not just place a complete ban on all campaigning and all media reporting. Just imagine, the election campaign period as a time for quiet contemplation!

Endnotes

- 1 In 2002, 30 of the 66 countries that participated in the study carried out by the Foundation for Information had “embargos on the publication of poll results on or prior to election day. In 16 of these 30 countries, poll results cannot be published at least five days before an election”; Frits Spangenberg, *The Freedom to Publish Opinion Poll Results: Report on a Worldwide Update*, (Amsterdam: ESOMAR/WAPOR, 2003). This report can be found at <http://www.unl.edu/WAPOR/Opinion%20polls%202003%20final%20version.pdf>.
- 2 Quoted in J.J.M. van Holsteyn and J.M. den Ridder, *Alles blijft anders: Nederlandse kiezers en verkiezingen in het begin van de 21^e eeuw* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005), p. 31.
- 3 Ibid. (translation GI).
- 4 William Safire, *Safire’s New Political Dictionary: The definitive guide to the new language of politics*, (New York: Random House, 1993), p. 43.
- 5 See Thomas B. Littlewood, *Calling Elections* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) and Susan Herbst, *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- 6 Claude Robinson, *Straw Votes: A Study of Political Persuasion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 1.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid, p.138.
- 9 See Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots & Emergence 1890-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). In 1948, Claude Robinson and George Gallup founded Gallup & Robinson Inc., an agency dealing with advertising and market research.
- 10 Walter M. Pierce, “Climbing on the Bandwagon”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1940, p. 241.
- 11 Ibid, p. 243.
- 12 G.F. Lewis jr., “The Congressmen Look at the Polls”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 4., No. 1, 1940, p. 106.
- 13 Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People’s Choice* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1944), p. 106 (emphasis added.)
- 14 George Gallup, “Polls and the Political Process – Past, Present, and

- Future”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1965, p. 546.
- 15 Michael L.Young, *The American Dictionary of Campaigns and Elections* (Lanham: Hamilton Press, 1987), p. 81, (emphasis added).
- 16 Herbert Asher, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 2e edition (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press: 1992), p. 119 (emphasis added).
- 17 The first use of the term underdog in the scientific literature seems to have been in 1954 in a piece by Herbert A. Simon who wrote: *If persons are more likely to vote for a candidate when they expect him to win than when they expect him to lose, we have a “bandwagon” effect; if the opposite holds, we have an “underdog” effect.* Herbert A. Simon, “Bandwagon and Underdog Effects and the Possibility of Election Predictions”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1954), pp. 245-253.
- 18 In its post-election edition, the weekly *De Tijd* published an article entitled, “Wat er mis ging met het CDA”. The headline is included in the text.
- 19 We argued that to be potentially influenced, a voter would have to satisfy four conditions:
1. The voter would have to be aware of the results of polls.
 2. The voter would have to believe that the results of these polls were reasonably accurate, that is, they reflected the preferences in the electorate at that moment.
 3. The voter would not always vote for the same party; if a person always votes for the same party he or she should be relatively impervious to any influence by the polls.
 4. And finally, the voter would have to make a final decision concerning his or her vote choice no earlier than the final months of the campaign; if the decision was made earlier, it could also hardly have been influenced by the polls published in the final run-up to the election, G.A. Irwin and J.J.M. van Holsteyn, “Opiniepeilingen en stemgedrag”, in Rudy B. Andeweg (ed.), *Tussen steekproef en stembus* (Leiden: DSWO Press, 1988), p. 55.
- 20 G.A. Irwin, J.J.M. van Holsteyn and J.M. den Ridder, *Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2002-2003* (Amsterdam: NIWI/Steinmetz Archive, 2005).
- 21 An example of the influence of public opinion polls on journalists is found in the decision of whom to invite to participate in this debate. Even though his party held only 9 seats in the Second Chamber, because it was doing so well in the polls, even reaching as high as 24 seats, Jan Marijnissen of the SP was invited to participate. On the other hand, no one from the LPF was invited, even though it was the second largest party in the Parliament, but had subsequently dropped dramatically in the polls.
- 22 Van Praag and Geijtenbeek note that this conclusion was based upon a sample of only 150 of the 300 respondents who had been interviewed the previous day concerning their expectations of who would win the debate. The conclusion that 39 per cent of VVD voters agreed that Zalm was the loser was based on only 17 VVD-voters. Philip van Praag and Wilbert Geijtenbeek, “Het onderschatte debat” in Kees Brants and Philip van Praag (eds), *Politiek en Media in Verwarring: De verkiezingscampagnes in het lange jaar 2002* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005), p. 124.
- 23 An example of how polls affect politicians and campaign managers is seen in the reaction of Prime Minister Balkenende to these results. On Saturday, January 11, in the television program *Het Elfde Uur*, he challenged the PvdA and Bos to announce who would be its candidate for premier. Bos had earlier announced that he would not be a candidate. (See *Ibid*, p.127).
- 24 For television reports, see Philip van Praag and Kees Brants, “Gefascineerd door de *horse race*” in Kees Brants and Philip van Praag (eds), *Politiek en Media in Verwarring: De verkiezingscampagnes in het lange jaar 2002* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005) p. 83; for the national newspapers see, Kasper Heijting and Roy de Haan, “*De gestage teloorgang van politieke inhoud*”, in Kees Brants and Philip van Praag (eds), *Politiek en Media in Verwarring: De verkiezingscampagnes in het lange jaar 2002* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005), p. 51.
- 25 In 1986 and in 2002 respondents were also asked if they believed that the polls accurately reflected the choices of the voters. In 1986 5 per cent thought the polls did a “very good” job and 57 per cent thought they did a “good” job of reflecting voter choices. In 2002 this trust in the accuracy of the polls was lower. Less than one per cent felt that the polls were “very good” in indicating the support

- for the various parties, and only 33 per cent felt they did a “good” job. This may be a reflection of discussions in the media in 2002 concerning the fact that the two leading polling agencies did not always agree. (See van Holsteyn and den Ridder, *op cit.*, p.20) This question was not asked in 2003.
- 26 In addition, no relationship is found between such social-demographic background variables as education, income, subjective social class, and gender and whether or not one reported having been influenced by polls.
- 27 These data are drawn from the 2002 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, and are thus available only for those respondents from 2003 who had also participated in the 2002 surveys.
- 28 A distinction was made between PvdA-voters who said they were influenced by the polls and those who said they were not. Non-PvdA-voters were also divided into the same groups. These four groups were then compared on the same variables of political interest. No statistically significant relationships could be found. PvdA-voters, whether influenced or not, were equally interested in politics and were equally unhappy with the CDA-VVD-LPF coalition.
- 29 See, for example Arend Lijphart, “The Netherlands” in Richard Rose (ed.), *Electoral Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1974, pp. 227-270; Rudy B. Andeweg, *Dutch Voters Adrift* (Leiden: Ph.D. dissertation, 1982); Galen A. Irwin and Joop J.M. van Holsteyn, “Where to From Here? Revamping Electoral Politics in the Netherlands”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1997), pp. 93-118.
- 30 For the concept of multiple identification with political parties in the Netherlands, see C. van der Eijk and B. Niemöller, *Electoral change in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: CT Press, 1983).
- 31 For an analysis of such questions in terms of the maximum potential electorate for the various parties, see J.N. Tillie, “Stemkans en potentieel electoraat”, in J.J.M. van Holsteyn, G.A. Irwin, and C. van der Eijk, *De Nederlandse kiezer '86* (Amsterdam: Steinmetzarchief, 1987), pp. 180-188; and C. van der Eijk and B. Niemöller, “Het potentiële electoraat van de Nederlandse politieke partijen, *Beleid en Maatschappij*, Vol. 11, No. 7/8 (1984), pp. 192-204.
- 32 Parties of the left were defined as PvdA, GreenLeft, Socialist Party, and D66. Voters could indicate a preference (i.e. score of 9 or 10) for PvdA plus one or more of the other three.
- 33 Galen A. Irwin and Joop J.M. van Holsteyn, “According to the Polls: the influence of opinion polls on expectations”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 66, 2002, pp. 92-104.
- 34 See, J.J.M. Van Holsteyn and G.A. Irwin, “Opiniepeilingen en kiesgedrag”, in A.E. Bronner, et al. (eds), *Ontwikkelingen in het marktonderzoek: Jaarboek 2004*. (Haarlem: De Vrieseborch: 2004), pp. 53-66.
The fact that the Socialist Party dropped from a high of 24 seats in a poll by Maruice de Hond at the end of November to only 9 seats at the election in January, the same number of seats as it had received in 2002, indicates that voters on the left were shifting to the PvdA, undoubtedly to strengthen its position in the new cabinet negotiations.
- 35 Van Praag and Geijtenbeek, *op cit*, p. 118.

In deze reeks verschijnen teksten van oraties en afscheidscolleges.

Meer informatie over Leidse hoogleraren:
Leidsewetenschappers.Leidenuniv.nl

PROF. GALEN A. IRWIN Ph.D.



- 1973-77 Associate Professor (Wetenschappelijk
hoofdmedewerker)
- 1977-79 Reader (Lector)
- 1980-2004 Full Professor (Hoogleraar)
- 1972-73 Fellow, Netherlands Institute for Advanced
Study in the Social
Sciences and Humanities (NIAS)
- 1988-89
- 1975-2005 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, member
Advisory Board (1979-2005),
Project director or co-director (1976-78, 1986-
87, 2002-2003) and Chairman Advisory Board
(1999-2005)
- 1985-2003 Chairman, Department of Political Science,
University of Leiden (1985-87, 1996-98 and
2001-03)

My earliest recollection of politics is listening with my father to the radio broadcasts of the American political party conventions of 1952. Since then I have been fascinated by voting, elections, and election campaigns. Questions related to these topics have formed the core of my research over the years. In coming to the Netherlands I gained the opportunity of being associated with the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study. In recent years I have become particularly interested in how voters use information from public opinion polls in determining for which party to vote. This topic will be the focus of my research in the coming years.



Universiteit Leiden