

assonance, which affect attitude change and memorability in the audience. Proverbs thus are (natural) instruments in any process of public opinion formation. In six historical case studies chosen from diverse polities around the world, Mieder uncovers the impact of these “soundbites avant la lettre.” Throughout his book the author expresses the view that proverbs (and those who use them!) should at least arouse our suspicion. Strangely enough, this missionary approach makes this instructive treatise even more exciting.

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Political Persuasion and Attitude Change. Edited by Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman, and Richard A. Brody. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. 1996. 295 pp.

Given the ubiquity of persuasion phenomena within the political arena, it is surprising that the study of attitude and belief change has not been as popular or central a topic of inquiry in political science as it has been in the fields of psychology and communication. The present book represents a growing attempt (see Iyengar & McGuire, 1993) to address this gap. As stated by the editors in their introductory essay, the purpose of the volume is “to make the case for the systematic study of political persuasion, separate from and comparable in importance to the study of voting and public opinion, and to contribute, from a variety of angles and drawing on a number of independent research programs, to this new field of study.” The editors note that although “politics, at its core, is about persuasion,” prior studies in political science have failed to illuminate the processes of attitude change at the individual level. Thus, a new subfield—political persuasion—is needed. In addition to the provocative introductory essay, the book contains 10 interesting chapters written primarily by political scientists, but also includes some contributions by researchers in the fields of communication and psychology. The book is organized into three sections: “Mass Media and Political Persuasion,” “Persuasion by Political Elites,” and “Individual Control of the

Persuasion Process." The essays in each section vary in their scope and focus, with some chapters serving as general reviews of relatively large bodies of research and others providing detailed discussions of a few data sets.

Despite the differences in content, focus, and scope of the essays, there are some interesting issues and themes that emerge either explicitly or implicitly throughout the book. One issue that occurred to us was the general lack of connection between the work on political persuasion reported in this volume and the contemporary basic work on attitude change conducted in psychology and other fields. Some of this is apparently deliberate. In their introductory essay, Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody argue that although the area of political persuasion should be responsive to advances in other disciplines, political persuasion should be a distinct area of inquiry *separate* from other bodies of work on attitude change (such as that developed within the field of social psychology). They suggest that political persuasion is unique and different from other types of persuasion because politics is a domain in which (1) it is acceptable for individuals to disagree, (2) it is permissible for people to try to persuade each other, (3) the arguments used tend to be well scripted, (4) attitudes are based on relatively little information, and (5) this information is acquired largely through the mass media.

This line of reasoning did not seem entirely convincing for several reasons. First, it is not clear that this characterization of the political domain is completely accurate. For example, there are certain areas in which disagreement with normative beliefs is regarded as highly undesirable and can result in significant negative social consequences (e.g., explicitly racist political beliefs). Similarly, it is not entirely clear that attempts at political persuasion are always accepted as legitimate. For instance, obvious government propaganda efforts would presumably be looked upon unfavorably. Furthermore, some voters are relatively uninformed, whereas others are political animals who are ravenous consumers of political information. Second, even if one granted that their characterization of the political domain was generally accurate, the same points might also be made about persuasion in many other areas of social behavior. In the area of consumer choice, for instance, it is generally true that it is acceptable for people to prefer different products, for people to try to convince other people of the merits of a product, for the arguments in favor of particular products to become well scripted, and for attitudes to be based on relatively little information that is derived typically from the mass media. Finally, and most important, Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody never clearly articulate why these features of the political context would undermine the applicability of social-psychological (or other) persuasion research to the political domain. Variables relevant to their characterization of the political domain, such as social desirability (e.g., Paulhus, 1991), bias due to awareness of persuasive intent (e.g., Hass & Grady, 1975), direct/indirect experience with attitude objects (e.g., Fazio & Zanna, 1981), and amount of knowledge (e.g.,

Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995), have all been studied by basic attitude researchers. Thus, there is relatively little conceptual or empirical basis for assuming that political persuasion operates in a *fundamentally* different manner from the types of persuasion situations and variables studied by attitude researchers in social psychology and other disciplines.

To some extent, the editors' point of view appears to have been shaped by basic work on attitude change in the 1950s and '60s when relatively little attention was paid to moderator variables. In the past 20 years or so, basic work on attitude change has increasingly examined the differences that occur in persuasion processes when persuasion is viewed as permissible or not, on controversial issues or not, when people are informed or not, and so forth (for reviews see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Wegener, 1998).

The view that work on political persuasion should proceed independently from the more basic work on attitude change is also evident, at least implicitly, in many of the individual essays in the volume. Thus, some readers, outside of political science at least, might be surprised by how little contemporary theory and research on persuasion processes from other disciplines is incorporated into many of the chapters. The only attitude change and persuasion theories that are discussed across the chapters with any regularity are Hovland's Message Learning Approach and McGuire's Input-Output Matrix Model of the Persuasion Process (see McGuire, 1985). Even these theories seldom play a particularly central role in predictions or explanations advanced in the essays. Other classic attitude theories such as cognitive dissonance theory (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) are notably absent in their impact. One interesting exception to this point is Diamond and Cobb's essay (chapter 9), which draws quite directly on Sherif's Social Judgment Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). More striking is the general absence of references to more contemporary attitude research. Recent theories of persuasion such as the Heuristic Systematic Model (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) are largely ignored. Similarly, there is relatively little evidence that political persuasion researchers are making use of contemporary research on attitude structure and function (e.g., Pratkanis, Breckler, & Greenwald, 1989) and on attitude strength (e.g., Petty & Krosnick, 1995).

The fact that so few of the essays significantly draw upon contemporary attitude and persuasion research is disappointing because many of the theories and findings in contemporary attitude research seem relevant to the issues raised throughout the book. For example, Kuklinski and Hurley (chapter 5) present interesting data showing how the race and political ideology of the source of a communication can influence acceptance and interpretation of the message. These findings seem quite directly relevant to research in social psychology exploring the multiple roles by which characteristics of the message source can influence persuasion. Another example of the failure to draw upon

contemporary attitude research is the widespread interest in the role of political knowledge in political persuasion. A number of chapters (e.g., 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, and 11) include analyses and discussions of how knowledge about politics in general or a specific issue influences political persuasion. However, most of these chapters do comparatively little to relate predictions and findings to relevant research in psychology exploring the impact of message topic knowledge on persuasion.

Another interesting issue that emerges from reading the essays is that there seems to be much that is yet to be defined and clarified in terms of the content and scope of political persuasion as an area of inquiry. In regard to content, it is difficult to discern from the essays a core set of research questions that are central to the field. Instead, each essay addresses issues that have relatively little in common with issues addressed in other chapters except in the broadest sense. With respect to scope, much of the work seems aimed at how elites affect the mass public. Thus, there are no chapters addressing how members of the political elite persuade one another. Nor are there any chapters exploring the persuasion processes by which average citizens influence each other. Are these topics beyond the scope of political persuasion, or have they just not yet been addressed?

Despite these reservations, we found the book to be invigorating and very worthwhile reading. We were convinced that political persuasion is an important and exciting area of research that should receive more attention from social scientists. Each of the authors and chapters in this book has contributed to the promise of the field. Persuasion is undeniably a pervasive aspect of the political process, and it is difficult to imagine reaching a full understanding of the dynamics of public opinion or the operation of modern democracies without understanding persuasion processes. Additionally, politics is a fascinating and challenging social context for attitude change researchers to test more general theories of persuasion. Much of the data being produced and many of the issues being raised in the field of political persuasion are quite fascinating, and the well-written essays accumulated in *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* reflect this fact. Social scientists interested in familiarizing themselves with the major issues being explored in the field will find the book to be a valuable resource. Our own dissatisfaction with some aspects of the book really has more to do with the current state of this young field than it does with the book itself or the active researchers in the field per se. It is not at all unusual for researchers in different disciplines (and even within the same discipline) to work on common problems in isolation. Our objection is to the *advocacy* of the special uniqueness of political persuasion and the implication that research in this domain can proceed in isolation from other work on attitude change. Of course, work on political persuasion poses its special challenges and opportunities. Nevertheless, we believe that political persuasion (like consumer persuasion, health persuasion, legal persuasion, and so forth) is an area of inquiry that is

well suited for closer collaboration between researchers interested in general persuasion processes and researchers interested specifically in political persuasion. Perhaps in the future, the field will develop in this direction.

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