



1996

## Political Persuasion: The Birth of a Field of Study

Diana C. Mutz

University of Pennsylvania, mutz@sas.upenn.edu

Paul Sniderman

Richard Brody

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers](https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers)



Part of the [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Mutz, D. C., Sniderman, P. M., and Brody, R. (1996). Political Persuasion: The Birth of a Field of Study, in *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (pp. 1-16). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [https://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers/623](https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/623)  
For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

## Political Persuasion: The Birth of a Field of Study

### Disciplines

Communication | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Social Influence and Political Communication

Chapter 9. The Candidate as Catastrophe: Latitude Theory and the Problems of Political Persuasion <i>Gregory Andrade Diamond and Michael D. Cobb</i>	225
Chapter 10. Persuasion in Context: The Multilevel Structure of Economic Evaluations <i>Jeffery J. Mondak, Diana C. Mutz, and Robert Huckfeldt</i>	249
Chapter 11. Time of Vote Decision and Openness to Persuasion <i>Steven H. Chaffee and Rajiv Nath Rimal</i>	267
Contributors	293

## CHAPTER 1

**Political Persuasion: The Birth of a Field of Study**

*Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman,  
and Richard A. Brody*

As a field of study, political persuasion has a long lineage but a brief history. On the one side, it is easy—and fitting—to point to classical studies, by scholars of propaganda analysis, public opinion, and marketing research, all calling attention to the new dynamics of democratic politics created by the simultaneous rise of mass media and public institutions for mass literacy. As Walter Lippmann (1937) explained, “A new situation has arisen throughout the world, created by the spread of literacy among the people and the miraculous improvement of the means of communication. Always the opinions of relatively small publics have been a prime force in political life, but now, for the first time in history, we are confronted nearly everywhere by mass opinion as the final determinant of political and economic action.” On the other side, even today, despite all the notable studies that have been accomplished, it is difficult to point to a body of cumulative studies establishing who can be talked out of what political positions and how. It is, accordingly, the twofold purpose of this book 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.

Politics, at its core, is about persuasion. It hinges not just on whether citizens at any one moment in time tend to favor one side of an issue over another, but on the numbers of them that can be brought, when push comes to shove, from one side to the other or, indeed, induced to leave the sidelines in order to take a side. Politics is about turning minorities of today into majorities of tomorrow, and the risk as well as the strength of democratically contested politics lies precisely in its openness to change.

Persuasion is ubiquitous in the political process; it is also the central aim of political interaction. It is literally the stuff of politics: Whether the object is to deter nuclear attack, cajole an obdurate legislator, win over a Supreme

Court justice, hold a supporter in place, or nudge a voter in a favorable direction, the end is *persuasion*.

Democracy, in particular, is distinguished as a form of governance by the extent of persuasion relative to coercion. Yet, the study of public opinion and political psychology has concentrated on the statics, rather than the dynamics, of political preferences. It is not our intention to suggest that there has been a complete dearth of interest in the issue of change. On the contrary, one can point to quite a few distinguished studies, some of which we shall say a word about in a moment. It is instead our aim to underline that, in the study of politics as elsewhere, method tends to drive substantive focus at least as much as substantive focus shapes method.

The cross-sectional general population survey has been far and away the principal vehicle for the study of public opinion and politics. It has proven to be a tool of exceptional value, but the very size of the benefits it has conferred has tended to obscure the size of the costs it also has imposed. Most fundamentally, the objective of a cross-sectional public opinion survey is to offer a portrait of public opinion in one specific slice of time, and the inevitable consequence for the systematic study of public opinion has been a focus on the statics, not the dynamics, of political preferences.

Different research designs—most notably panel samples, which involve interviewing and then reinterviewing the same individual at two or more points in time—have been deployed from time to time. Yet, in an irony worth acknowledgement, the study of change has been put to use in precisely the substantive context where it has been least useful—namely, the study of voting. From the classic studies of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia to those of Converse and his colleagues at Michigan, the lesson that panel studies have taught is the overpowering stability of partisan loyalties both between and during election campaigns (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Converse 1962, 1970). Panel studies of political attitudes over extended periods of time fixed attention on two patterns of public opinion at opposing extremes. At one pole, attitudes that were integrally tied up with electoral choices—above all, partisanship—although not set absolutely in cement, proved to be overwhelmingly fixed even over relatively extended periods of voters' lives. At the opposite pole, attitudes toward a miscellany of nonelectoral issues seemed so variable, either over time or in response to apparently trivial changes in question wording, as to call into question the presumption that a genuine attitude had been there in the first place (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). From either direction, there seemed little point to studying systematically the conditions under which ordinary citizens could be persuaded to take one rather than another position on an array of issues: political attitudes either changed so

little that they could hardly be said to change at all or changed so much that it could hardly be said that they were attitudes at all.

Panel studies have thrown light on the dynamics of political attitudes, and longitudinal studies focusing on time series generated by the repetition of cross-sectional opinion surveys with fixed questionnaire content have thrown still more.<sup>1</sup> But whether panel or repeated cross section, this stream of studies has been confined to the study of the natural fluctuation of political preferences, providing a record of what preferences have changed, by how much, and when. As useful as a record of the natural variation of political preferences over an extended period of time is, it is doubly limited as a basis for understanding change. It is limited, in the first instance, because it illuminates only obliquely the actual processes of change at the individual level. Partly, this is because what is systematically measured is change in response, not the stimulus that evoked it, and there are, unavoidably, huge constraints on inference from naturally occurring covariation of any appreciable degree of complexity. Actual political-historical events are complex, simultaneously involving multiple aspects of change, and only through experimental randomization can these analytically distinguishable aspects be causally unconfounded to determine which aspects are prepotent and which are not.

Restricting analysis to the study of naturally occurring change is confining in a second way as well. The objective must be to understand how processes of change, in general, and political persuasion, in particular, work, and this requires, as a moment's reflection will make plain, observing not only how people responded to the play of forces in any given historical circumstance, but also how they respond when put in different circumstances and exposed either to different forces or to similar ones in a different mix. It is just this competence of catching hold of behavior in circumstances more varied than those that actually occurred, but not merely hypothetical, that sets experimentation apart.

Experimentation is not a necessary condition for the study of change. The studies of political persuasion presented in this volume clearly demonstrate otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have capitalized on combining a wide variety of methodological approaches so that rigorous designs can be synthesized with findings that are generalizable to real-world political settings. Indeed, research on political persuasion is characterized by an unusual degree of methodological pluralism. Likewise, the chapters in this volume reflect a wide range of methodological approaches. In many chapters, survey data are combined with experimental studies to circumvent the shortcomings of each. For example, in chapter 3, Miller and Krosnick use both approaches in an attempt to resolve inconsistencies between experimental and survey studies in identifying who is most susceptible to persuasion under what conditions. In chapter



7, Sigelman and Rosenblatt highlight the contributions of methodological pluralism to understanding the power of presidents to persuade mass opinion. In still other chapters, traditional panel studies, longitudinal designs, and cross-sectional surveys are combined with laboratory experiments, personal interviews, and quasi-experimental designs. What we are arguing, then, is this: experimentation is not a necessary condition for any individual study of change, but having experimentation as part of the mix of methodological approaches is a necessary condition for launching political persuasion as a systematic field of study.<sup>3</sup>

But what does it mean to speak of the study of political persuasion as a distinctive field of study? Why use the term *political persuasion* at all? Why not just speak of studies of persuasion that happen to concentrate on opinions about public issues? Isn't the study of the conditions under which political preferences can be modified merely a derivative subfield of the study of attitude change *tout court*? And even if the particular examples are taken from the realm of politics, aren't the fundamental ideas and systematic principles in fact the work of social psychologists, with political scientists assigned the secondary role of applying them to the particular field of public affairs?

We do not wish to leave the impression that we place a low value on the study of attitude change as it has developed in other disciplines and, above all, in social psychology. On the contrary: for originality, breadth of interest, imagination in operationalization, fertility in application, rigor of argument, and sheer intellectual flair, the social psychological study of attitude change has no counterpart of which we are aware. And yet we see a case for political persuasion as an autonomous field of research, responsive to intellectual and methodological advancements outside itself but developing on its own lines, guided by the need to address its own distinctive problems.

A variety of considerations serve to highlight the uniqueness of political persuasion. For one, questions of politics stand out, because just insofar as they are considered to be political matters, it is socially acceptable for people to take different positions on them. Of course, people can have a very short fuse with others who disagree with them about political issues, but differences of opinion about public affairs have a legitimacy that is distinctive. Indeed, they have both the encouragement and the protection of an array of political and social institutions, of which the First Amendment has become the most conspicuous.

Moreover, it is legitimate not only for citizens to disagree about public affairs, but also for each to try to persuade the other to change his or her mind. As a democratic polity, we have not merely permitted but institutionalized argument about public issues and personalities. Political discourse across lines of difference is essential to most conceptions of a democratic public

sphere (e.g., Habermas 1964). It is important precisely because it creates opportunities for political persuasion to occur.

Arguments about political issues, precisely because they are so well practiced, tend to be well scripted: people can get the point, recognize the broader argument being made, notwithstanding the unevenness of their interest in politics and the thinness of their understanding of abstract political ideas. A symbolic phrase or two—a reference here or there to the “welfare mess,” to mention only one example—can call to mind a whole line of argument. The general public is fairly adept at making out the political bottom line of arguments over public affairs directed at them. Ordinary citizens, despite the fitfulness of their attention to politics, are also not bad at the political fingerprints on these arguments: they are capable of recognizing whether particular arguments come from political quarters with which they are broadly sympathetic or those they cannot abide.

A quite different argument for the distinctiveness of political persuasion as a field of research comes from the intrinsic properties of mass politics. Political views tend to be less involving just insofar as politics characteristically fails to involve the deepest interests of most citizens. For this very reason, political attitudes tend to be based on notoriously low levels of information. Furthermore, in politics, unlike many other areas of life, persuasive messages tend to be communicated not directly but indirectly, often through mass mediated channels. The fact that this form of communication is public and simultaneously reaches many people has important implications for the persuasion process. Moreover, studies of political persuasion inevitably require taking into account the persuasive efforts of political elites as well as the mass media and mass public.

Although psychological studies have been extremely useful in understanding who is most susceptible to persuasive attempts, it is often unclear how these findings translate to a range of political contexts. To presume that political attitudes are altered in the same way as attitudes toward products or personal matters ignores the uniqueness of the political context. Even within the realm of political contexts, there is tremendous variability from one election to another, from one kind of issue to another, and from one social environment to another.

To date, most models of the political persuasion process have not taken these factors into account. The early source-message-receiver model emphasized “who says what to whom, with what effect,” but did not systematically study the context in which persuasion occurred. Even the far more complex communication/persuasion matrix developed by McGuire is, in his words, “a theory of persons” (McGuire 1981).

In his now classic formulation, Lewin (1936) described attitudes as a function of both people and circumstances. However, variability across

people initially received the bulk of research attention. Since that time, one of the most important contributions that social psychology has made to understanding human behavior is an appreciation of the power and subtlety of situational influences on attitudes and behaviors, "that manipulations of the immediate social situation can overwhelm in importance the type of individual differences in personal traits or dispositions that people normally think of as being determinative of social behavior" (Nisbett and Ross 1991).

The implications of this generalization have yet to be fully heeded in studies of political persuasion and attitude change. More often than not, our topics of study and the methods we employ fail to take into systematic account the power of situations to influence political attitudes. This is particularly unfortunate in studies of political persuasion, because the fluidity of circumstances is precisely what gives politics its dynamic quality. After all, basic characteristics of individuals—their level of education, for example, or their overall outlook on politics, or even the level of their interest in politics—tend to be stable over time. In contrast, the features of their circumstances are transient, changing as one situation gives way to another. In the political realm in particular, "situations" are ever changing; as the ebb and flow of public debate varies from day to day, the political environment in which people find themselves is changed.

Our goal in *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* is to highlight a variety of substantive areas in the study of political attitude change, but to do so in a way that better mirrors the intricate world of political persuasion by systematically incorporating aspects of persons and their political environments. In this chapter, we begin by situating these contemporary research efforts in the broader context of research on political persuasion.

In the early 1900s, research on political persuasion flourished under the guise of propaganda analysis, public opinion research, social psychology, and marketing research. This emphasis emerged out of a general consensus that persuasion had become increasingly important as a result of major societal changes. The United States' involvement in two world wars early in this century fueled tremendous levels of interest in public opinion and attitude change.

But today, despite the rich history of research in psychology and in studies of voting behavior, the parameters of political persuasion remain elusive. One important reason for our limited knowledge is the early emphasis on the role of personal traits and individual predispositions in conditioning responses to political persuasion. Studies oriented around the source-message-receiver model focused on identifying empirical regularities that held across situations—for example, how persuasive impact is related to the age, gender, or attractiveness of a source; which message characteristics (negative versus

positive appeals, fast versus slow delivery) enhance persuasion; and which demographic or personality traits contribute to greater persuasibility (e.g., Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953).

The first phase of research in political psychology also was marked by a shared enthusiasm for using personality and the early life experiences shaping it to explain political attitudes and behaviors (McGuire 1993). The focus on personality emphasized attitude stability over an individual's lifetime (e.g., Adorno 1950). Sometimes long-term changes in political attitudes were argued to result from the slow evolution of personality types (e.g., Riesman 1950), but the emphasis was still on relative stability, particularly within the range of short-term political conflicts. In studies of voting behavior, this same enthusiasm manifested itself in the concept of party identification as a stable personal predisposition acquired early in life (see Chaffee and Hochheimer 1982).

Methodological considerations further contributed to the emphasis on individual traits and predispositions. One of the key legacies of the wartime emphasis on the persuasive influence of mass media was an experimental approach to the study of persuasive effects (Czitrom 1982). Studies of the "Why We Fight" series of army orientation films illustrated this new emphasis on rigorously controlled laboratory experiments oriented toward identifying individual psychological variables conditioning the persuasion process. While increasing the methodological rigor of many studies, the experimental approach to persuasion often separated research from its social contexts, be they political or otherwise. The interpersonal social context was considered extremely important in early survey research on political attitudes (e.g., Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). But when the dominant research mode shifted away from community-based studies to large national surveys, context did not fare well. The national scope of these projects often made it difficult to locate respondents in a particular political and social milieu. And perhaps more importantly, the findings of very little persuasion in the early studies of presidential elections were assumed to generalize to future elections. The focus of research became attitude stability or the lack thereof, rather than the sources of change in political views.

In addition to multimethod approaches, this collection of studies reflects important innovations in the study of political persuasion. The contributors to this volume have used a variety of methods that give concrete form to our proposed model by explicitly incorporating context into their studies. For example, Diamond and Cobb suggest a new way of using the traditional survey instrument that better represents people's attitudes as a range of possible responses or positions. Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt take advantage of a unique data collection design that samples not only potential targets of persuasion, but also their immediate social contexts. Still other contributors



such as Kuklinski and Hurley use hybrid survey-experiments. By using the survey interview as an opportunity to vary systematically the situational pressures respondents face, the survey is transformed from a passive to an interactive process, and one that better imitates the range of situations in which real-world political opinions are expressed.

Precisely because political persuasion has resisted formulaic simplification, its study requires sophisticated methodological approaches. Some persuasive considerations have more impact on some persons than on others; some opinions are more subject to modification than others; and both are more readily modifiable in some situations than in others. Characterizing the contexts in which political persuasion occurs is inevitably complex. To date there is precious little evidence specifying who can be talked out of what beliefs, and under what conditions. The studies in this volume reflect this complexity in that characteristics of the political environment are not studied in isolation from one another; instead, they emphasize interactions between characteristics of persons and their political environments.

In *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* we present an array of empirical studies developing this framework both substantively and methodologically. The contributors to this volume review a wide range of topics dealing with political persuasion. These include purposeful attempts by political elites to persuade mass public opinion, effects that flow from journalists' discretion in the selection of news stories, and influence that flows between people in the course of their interpersonal interactions. Since the authors are major figures in research on each of the respective areas they review, they also are able to contribute their latest findings and new insights into research on these topics.

The three sections of the book center on the three major agents of political persuasion. Part 1 is entitled "Mass Media and Political Persuasion," and it reviews several major areas of research on mass media's influence on political attitudes, including research on priming effects, the impact of political advertising, and the capacity for news coverage to change public opinion. In chapter 2, John Zaller begins this section with a broad statement of the problems involved in studying mass media's impact on political attitudes. In "The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revived: New Support for a Discredited Idea," Zaller argues that large media effects are seldom detected, not because such effects do not exist, but rather because the conditions necessary for detecting such effects are infrequent. In addition to good measurement of key variables, these conditions include large variations in the flow of communication reaching the public and an imbalance between the flow of messages promoting opposing sides. He concludes that media effects on mass opinion are both very large and very common; these effects are simply difficult to observe because large changes in media content are infrequent and difficult to

predict, and because stable flows of competing communications effectively cancel one another out in terms of their net effects.

In illustrating these points, Zaller extends his earlier work on conditional relationships between exposure to political communication and attitude change. Using election data and attitudes toward a variety of public issues, he demonstrates how "exposure gaps" generated by differences in the intensity of various campaigns combine to form a "crossover effect," whereby those most susceptible to persuasion are those least informed in some contexts, while it is the more informed who may be moved in other contexts.

In chapter 3, Joanne Miller and Jon Krosnick review and add new evidence to the burgeoning research on the priming hypothesis, a major area of media effects research. The authors provide a detailed account of research on the priming hypothesis as an important form of mass political persuasion. In addition to synthesizing the literature bearing on the extent to which news media alter the standards the public uses in evaluating political figures, they pay particular attention to who is most susceptible to priming effects. Miller and Krosnick find that the role of political involvement in susceptibility to persuasion is particularly complex, with multiple components predicting quite different outcomes. For example, high levels of exposure and attention to political news weaken priming effects, while high levels of knowledge facilitate greater priming effects. Thus, a prime candidate for priming would be a highly knowledgeable person who, nonetheless, faces a situation in which he or she has little time to attend to political news.

The last chapter in part 1 departs from this emphasis on the effects of the news media and addresses political advertising as yet another form of mass mediated persuasive communication. In "The Craft of Political Advertising: A Progress Report" Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar review their extensive research program on the persuasive power of political advertising. Using laboratory experiments, they isolate individual components of political advertisements and tease apart interactions between multiple factors influencing the persuasion process. At the same time, they note that political advertising does not occur in a vacuum and, therefore, methodological accommodations need to be made in order to systematically incorporate the effects of the political context in which advertisements occur.

Part 2 focuses on persuasion by political elites. These three chapters illustrate substantive and methodological problems in past research on the persuasive efforts of political elites, while simultaneously breaking new ground in our understanding of why elites succeed or fail in influencing public opinion. The section begins with an exploration of the impact of political elites on the interpretation of persuasive messages. In chapter 5, James Kuklinski and Norman Hurley use an experimental design to demonstrate the powerful effects that merely changing the source of a given message has on

the interpretation of messages. Moreover, these interpretations vary by characteristics of the receiver in interaction with characteristics of the source of the message. For example, black citizens interpreted a message advocating black self-reliance very differently depending on whether it was purported to have been stated by Jesse Jackson, Clarence Thomas, Edward Kennedy, or George Bush. In "It's a Matter of Interpretation," Kuklinski and Hurley conclude based on evidence of these strong source effects that what seems like random attitude change on the part of the mass public may not be random at all.

In the second chapter of this section, Kathleen McGraw and Clark Hubbard review research on "account giving" as a strategy of elite persuasion, that is, the efforts of political elites to control public opinion by accounting for their behavior in strategic ways in order to persuade their constituents that they are deserving of continued support. In addition to reviewing work on account giving as a form of political persuasion, chapter 6 emphasizes the kinds of personal characteristics that make the explanations offered by political elites compelling forms of political persuasion.

In chapter 7, Lee Sigelman and Alan Rosenblatt discuss the most prominent forum for elite persuasion of mass opinion: the presidency. The authors review work on the president's ability to persuade the public with an emphasis on the necessity of methodological innovation to improve the validity of evidence pertaining to presidential powers of persuasion. The relatively small sample of presidents and the problems involved in distinguishing changes in opinion that occur for other reasons make this a particularly difficult persuasion context for establishing both internal and external validity.

Political persuasion is clearly not a simple, mechanistic process whereby one agent puts forth a persuasive message and its audience automatically falls prey; people play an important role in their own persuasion. Thus, Part 3 of this book focuses on the tremendously important yet often overlooked role that individuals play in their own persuasion. Given the large amount of potentially persuasive information that people encounter, they inevitably weigh some considerations more than others and are more easily persuaded in some contexts than in others. The four chapters composing the section on "Individual Control of the Political Persuasion Process" directly address individual susceptibility and resistance to persuasion.

In chapter 8, Dennis Chong proposes a general theory of the process by which people select among the many considerations upon which they might rely in making up their minds about where they stand on a given issue. He examines political attitudes as a function of frames of reference that are sampled from the political environment. Since an individual cannot bring to bear all of the considerations surrounding a given issue when offering an opinion, he or she must sample from a reservoir of considerations that are

available for use in evaluating an issue. Since this frame of reference for viewing a given political issue can change based on the availability of various considerations and the conclusion toward which various considerations point, so too may his or her attitude.

Chong's model sheds light on attitude instability, survey response effects, and the process of attitude change. It suggests that some attitude instability may result from situational variation rather than unreliable measurement or randomly expressed pseudoattitudes. Moreover, if individual attitudes are expected to vary across situations, then it makes little sense to use consistency of attitudes within individuals as the *sine qua non* of "real" attitudes.

In chapter 9, Gregory Diamond and Michael Cobb propose a theory of attitude measurement that takes into account the fact that people may not have policy choices that can be accurately described by some optimally preferred point on an attitude scale. For most people in most situations, distinguishing between the precisely right response and the sufficiently right response is hardly worthwhile given their low levels of interest in politics and the costs of acquiring and analyzing new information. The authors conceptualize individual attitudes as ranges of possibilities rather than as single point estimates. Using latitude theory drawn from the work of Sherif and Hovland (1961), they measure attitudes as ranges of acceptance and rejection rather than as point estimates. In so doing, they question the very essence of what it means to be persuaded. For example, when attitudes are measured as optimal point placements, as is traditionally the case, persuasion is an act of conversion from one point on a line to another. When attitudes are conceptualized instead as ranges of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment, persuasion also includes the widening or narrowing of these ranges. Thus, from the perspective of political elites, "the battle is not to convince citizens that one's policy is right, but simply that it is not unreasonable." Political actors may further their policy preferences not only by changing people's minds, but also by widening their latitudes of noncommitment. Diamond and Cobb's approach, like Chong's in the preceding chapter, suggests that although individuals may not have long-lasting, consistent opinions on many issues of the day, their opinions still matter and are not entirely at the mercy of political elites.

In the third chapter of this section, Jeffery Mondak, Diana Mutz, and Robert Huckfeldt explore the process by which individuals come to rely on some social contexts over others in making their political judgments. Social context clearly matters in forming political attitudes, but given that individuals are embedded in multiple social contexts, how do they sort through the often conflicting information that they receive when taking social context into account? Many political judgments occur across multiple social contexts. It is one thing to argue that context influences political attitudes, but quite another to determine which of the many "contexts" in which people live are important



for a given political attitude. After reviewing evidence on how a variety of different economic contexts influences vote choice, the authors add new evidence bearing on the role of the neighborhood social context.

The last chapter of the book also concludes with an emphasis on the importance of context in political persuasion. "Time of Vote Decision and Openness to Persuasion" revisits one of the most persistent puzzles in research on political persuasion, the paradoxical relationship between exposure to political messages and susceptibility to persuasion. In their classic study of the 1940 presidential election, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) argued that the very same characteristics that lead people to expose themselves to political messages also insulate them from potential influence. In particular, the "last-minute deciders" who make up their minds during the course of the presidential campaign are generally uninterested in politics and highly unlikely to expose themselves to political messages. In chapter 11, Steven Chaffee and Rajiv Rimal explore the window of opportunity during which potential voters are open to being persuaded. Based on a review of past research and on new evidence from the 1992 elections, they conclude that time of voter decision is not a stable personal trait as has long been assumed. Instead, it is something that varies for individuals according to characteristics of the political context surrounding a given election.

Although persuasive skills have always been a valued asset (Lasswell, Lerner, and Speier 1979-81), there are few eras in human history in which persuasion has been as important a force as in the current mass media age (McGuire 1985). Collectively, these chapters exemplify the vitality of the newly emerged discipline focusing specifically on political persuasion. In one sense the studies described in this volume are part of a long lineage of research focusing on factors that bring about change in political attitudes. But they also mark the beginning of a more programmatic agenda of research and a formal field of study, one that is explicitly political in orientation and focused specifically on change, rather than the stability of political attitudes.

Volume upon volume has been written about political leadership, but scant attention has been paid to when and under what conditions people will follow. Whether those leaders are elected officials, network news anchors, or ordinary citizens, persuasion is the mechanism by which they exercise political leadership. The study of who follows under what conditions is of sufficient importance and distinctiveness substantively that a field of study is long overdue.

The quantity and quality of political persuasion is a core issue in evaluating the health of democratic systems of government. Although persuasion may be carried out in forums as seemingly disparate as the Lincoln-Douglas debates and 30-second television advertisements, the underlying principles are the same. Moreover, the study of political persuasion concerns itself with the most fundamental issue: the vitality of public debate as it is carried out

through the constant clamor of politics, the pull and tug of persuasive arguments. With this volume, we hope to mark the beginning of an equally vital field of research.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Page and Jones 1979; Stimson 1992.
2. See also, for example, Brody 1991.
3. It is important to observe that the character of experimentation itself has changed through the introduction of computer-assisted interviewing. Instead of being confined to the simplicities and rigidities of the classic split-ballot design, experiments of a high degree of complexity can be embedded in a public opinion interview in a way that is invisible to the respondent and effortless for the interviewer (see, e.g., Piazza and Sniderman 1989; Kinder and Palfrey 1993).

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, T. W. 1950. *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper.
- Berelson, B., P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. McPhee. 1954. *Voting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brody, Richard A. 1991. *Assessing the president: The media, elite opinion, and public support*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Chaffee, S. H., and J. L. Hochheimer. 1982. The beginnings of political communication research in the United States. In *The media revolution in America and Western Europe*, ed. E. M. Rogers and F. Balle, 263-83. Norwood: Ablex.
- Converse, P. E. 1962. Information flow and the stability of partisan attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26: 578-99.
- Converse, P. E. 1970. Attitudes and non-attitudes: Continuation of a dialogue. In *The quantitative analysis of social problems*, ed. E. R. Tuft, 168-89. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Converse, P. E. 1964. The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In *Ideology and discontent*, ed. D. E. Apter, 206-61. New York: Free Press.
- Czitrom, D. J. 1982. *Media and the American mind from Morse to McLuhan*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Habermas, J. 1964. *The public sphere*. Translated by S. Lennox and F. Lennox, *New German Critique* 3 (1974).
- Hovland, C. I., I. L. Janis, and H. H. Kelley. 1953. *Communication and persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Katz, E., and P. F. Lazarsfeld. *Personal influence*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
- Kinder, D. R., and T. R. Palfrey, eds. 1993. *Experimental foundations of political science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lasswell, H. D., D. Lerner, and H. Speier, eds. 1979-81. *Propaganda and communication in world history*. Vols. 1-3. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

- Lazarsfeld, P. F., B. Berelson, and H. Gaudet. 1944. *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.
- Lewin, K. 1936. *A dynamic theory of personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lippmann, W. 1937. Editorial foreword. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1.
- McGuire, W. J. 1981. Theoretical foundations of campaigns. Chap. 2 in *Public communication campaigns*, ed. R. E. Rice and W. J. Paisley. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- McGuire, W. J. 1985. Attitudes and attitude change. In *The handbook of social psychology*, 3d ed., ed. G. Lindzey and E. Aronson. New York: Random House.
- McGuire, W. J. 1993. The poly-psy relationship: Three phases of a long affair. Chap. 2 in *Explorations in political psychology*, ed. S. Iyengar and W. J. McGuire. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Page, Benjamin I., and Calvin Jones. 1979. Reciprocal effects of policy preferences, party loyalties, and the vote. *American Political Science Review* 73:1071-89.
- Piazza, T., P. M. Sniderman, and P. E. Tetlock. 1989. Analysis of the dynamics of political reasoning: A general-purpose computer-assisted methodology. In *Political analysis*, Vol. 1, ed. J. A. Stimson, 99-120. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Riesman, D. 1950. *The lonely crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Stimson, James A. 1992. *Public opinion in America: Mood, cycles, and swings*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- Zaller, J. R. 1992. *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## Part 1. Mass Media and Political Persuasion