

HARD CHOICES, EASY ANSWERS

Values, Information, and American Public Opinion

R. MICHAEL ALVAREZ AND JOHN BREHM

Those who seek to accurately gauge public opinion must first ask themselves: Why are certain opinions highly volatile while others are relatively fixed? Why are some surveys affected by question wording or communicative medium (e.g., telephone) while others seem immune? In *Hard Choices, Easy Answers*, R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm develop a new theory of response variability that, by reconciling the strengths and weaknesses of the standard approaches, will help pollsters and scholars alike better resolve such perennial problems. Working within the context of U.S. public opinion, they contend that the answers Americans give rest on a variegated structure of political predispositions—diverse but widely shared values, beliefs, expectations, and evaluations.

Alvarez and Brehm argue that respondents deploy what they know about politics (often little) to think in terms of what they value and believe. Working with sophisticated statistical models, they offer a unique analysis of not just what a respondent is likely to choose, but also how variable those choices would be under differing circumstances. American public opinion can be characterized in one of three forms of variability, conclude the authors: ambivalence, equivocation, and uncertainty. Respondents are sometimes ambivalent, as in attitudes toward abortion or euthanasia. They are often equivocal, as in views about the scope of government. But most often, they are uncertain, sure of what they value, but unsure how to use those values in political choices.

R. MICHAEL ALVAREZ is Professor of Political Science at the California Institute of

Technology and the author of *Information and Elections*. JOHN BREHM is Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *The Phantom Respondents* and the coauthor of *Working, Shirked, and Sabotage*.

For more information on the statistical data used in this book, consult www.pupress.princeton.edu/alvarez

"*Hard Choices, Easy Answers* offers a strikingly original and rigorous theory of public opinion built upon the interaction between psychological predispositions and political information. In addition to providing a refined portrait of the electorate's policy preferences, Alvarez and Brehm compare elites and masses, distinguish between individual and collective opinion, develop methods to interpret the variability of opinions, and draw lessons for theories of political representation—a total package that significantly advances our understanding of attitude formation, belief systems, and survey responses."

—Dennis Chong, *Northwestern University*

"*Hard Choices, Easy Answers* is a very attractive book that has taught me a good deal. It treats numerous topics in public opinion research, but the underlying theme is the wavering in people's minds when they are asked their political views. Anyone concerned with these topics will have to consult the studies included here. This book—whose authors are smart, prominent, productive scholars—will draw considerable attention."

—Christopher Achen, *University of Michigan*

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Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion

Albert A Gayle



Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion:

Unveiling the Magic of Words: A Overview of "**Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion**"

In a world defined by information and interconnectivity, the enchanting power of words has acquired unparalleled significance. Their capability to kindle emotions, provoke contemplation, and ignite transformative change is really awe-inspiring. Enter the realm of "**Hard Choices Easy Answers Values Information And American Public Opinion**," a mesmerizing literary masterpiece penned with a distinguished author, guiding readers on a profound journey to unravel the secrets and potential hidden within every word. In this critique, we shall delve in to the book is central themes, examine its distinctive writing style, and assess its profound affect the souls of its readers.

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