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*Knowing One's District: How Legislators Predict Referendum Voting**

This study assesses the ability of legislators to predict constituency opinion by comparing the predictions made by members of Florida's lower house with actual constituency opinion as reflected in subsequent referendum results. On the whole, predictions prove reasonably accurate. An attempt is also made to identify what influences legislators' predictions. On some issues, previous constituency voting behavior seems to guide the legislators' estimates of constituency opinion. Legislators' self-described role orientations are not consistently related to prediction prowess.

How adequately do legislators represent the views of their constituencies? Most empirical attempts to answer this central question of "representation" have been guided by the paraidgm outlined by Warren Miller and Donald Stokes (1962). This paradigm takes the form of the causal model shown in Figure 1. This model considers two sources of the legislator's voting decisions–his own views and his perceptions of his constituency's views. To the extent that the legislator follows his own convictions, he behaves as a "trustee" in the language of legislative role theory; to the extent that the legislator responds to the perceived dictates of his constituents, he behaves as an "instructed delegate" (Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson, 1962; Soule, 1969; and Davidson, 1969). Either form of behavior can result in congruence between actual constituency opinion and roll call behavior. If the process by which legislators are recruited and elected results in congruence between constituency and legislator opinion, the trustee model can supply the necessary linkage. If the legislators' perceptions of constituency opinion

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are reasonably accurate, the delegate model can supply the linkage. Thus, if causal links a and b (in the diagram) both hold or if causal links c and d both hold, constituency views will be positively related to roll call behavior. The possible complication of causal connections between the legislator's views and his perception of constituency views (e and f), provide some additional compound paths of linkage (Cnudde and McCrone, 1966).

Each of the key paths in the representation model (a, b, c, and d) has been the subject of some investigation. Of these, it is the path between actual and perceived constituency opinion that is the subject of the present paper. Because uncovering the accuracy of legislators' perceptions of constituency opinion demands either costly surveys of several constituencies or a fortuitously timed referendum, there have been few previous studies of the matter. Miller and Stokes (1962) report weak to modest correlations between con-

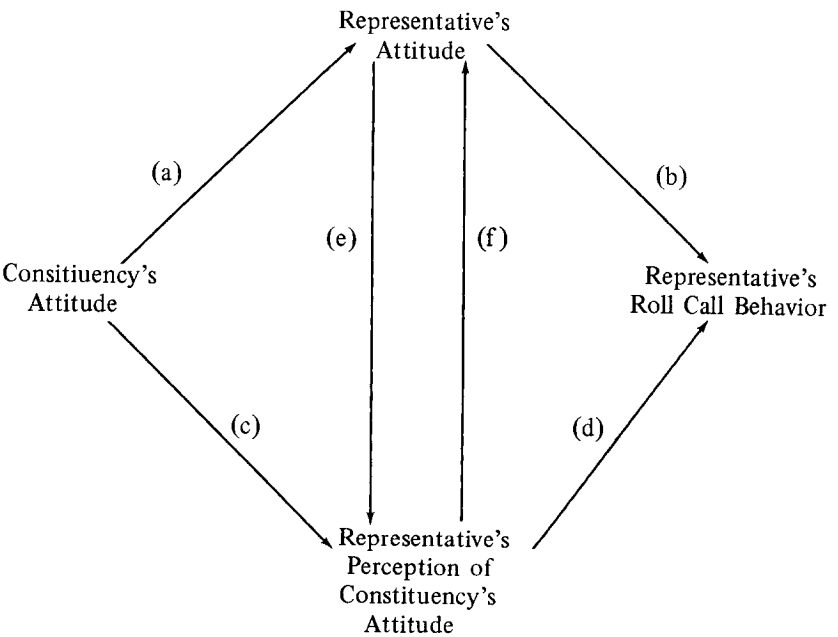

FIGURE 1
Connections between a Constituency's Attitude and Its Representative's Roll Call Behavior (from Miller and Stokes)

gressmen's perceptions of constituency opinion and actual constituency opinion as monitored in an SRC survey. Crane (1960) finds a strong relationship between Wisconsin legislators' roll call votes on daylight savings time and district voting in a later referendum on this issue. Crane's interviews with the legislators suggest that most of their roll call votes were responses to perceptions of constituency opinion that the referendum later verified. Hedlund and Friesema (1972) found most Iowa legislators could successfully predict their districts' majority opinion on each of four referenda put before the state's voters.

These studies also suggest that legislator accuracy is a function of an issue's salience. Miller and Stokes' congresmen could predict better on civil rights than on the less emotionally charged policy dimensions of domestic welfare and foreign policy. Hedlund and Friesema's state legislators predicted best on issues that appeared to attract the greatest public concern—reapportionment and home rule as opposed to the item veto and annual legislative sessions.

The Setting and the Data

The present study tests how accurately Florida state legislators could predict referenda opinion on three straw ballot issues placed before the state's voters on March 14, 1972, the date of Florida's presidential preference primary. Each straw ballot issue was in the form of an expression of opinion, with which the voters could agree or disagree. The referenda outcomes produced no sanction beyond the symbolic expression of public opinion. The three straw ballot statements were:

1. *A call for a constitutional amendment to forbid busing of school children for the purpose of achieving racial balance.* The antibusing statement was placed on the ballot at the initiative of Republican legislators who saw it as a source of embarassment for the Democrats. Democratic Governor Reuben Askew did not veto the straw ballot legislation but did campaign publicly against the antibusing proposition, an act which added to his national recognition. With George Wallace's presidential primary campaign against busing helping to arouse antibusing sentiment, the antibusing proposition undoubtedly was most salient to the public of the three straw ballot issues. More people voted on busing than on the other two straw ballot issues.

2. *A call for a constitutional amendment allowing prayers in public schools.* Although school prayer is normally an emotionally charged issue, putting prayers back in the school classroom was decidedly a *side* issue for Florida voters in the spring of 1972. In fact, this issue was added to the ballot

only a few weeks before the election, as part of some intricate legislative maneuvering.[1] Of the three straw ballot issues, the school prayer total vote was the second highest, equaling 96 percent of the vote on busing.

3. *A pledge for equality of education and opposition to the former dual (racially segregated) school system.* Added at the urging of Governor Askew, this item allowed the antibusing voter also to cast an antisegregation vote and therefore not appear a racist. Seemingly the least salient of the three straw ballot issues, the equal education statement received the greatest number of voter abstentions, as the number who voted on the issue equaled only 91 percent of the busing total.

Seven days before the election, we mailed brief questionnaires to all 119 members of Florida's lower house. We asked them to predict the percentage of the vote each of the three referendum statements would receive, both statewide and in their home district. By election day, 53 had returned fully complete questionnaires and four more returned forms that were partially usable—a return rate of slightly under 50 percent.[2]

Ideally, the issues on which one would assess the accuracy of legislators' perceptions of constituency views would be both highly salient to the mass public and matters on which the legislators would be asked to cast roll call votes. The availability of referendum results on busing, school prayer, and school integration appears to fulfill the first of these two criteria. But an obvious weakness of this study is that the three issues on which the legislators were asked to predict constituency opinion were not issues on which they themselves would have to take sides. This limitation is not as serious for the busing issue, however, because the legislators did have to cast well-publicized

[1] The school prayer proposition was added via a House amendment to the original straw ballot bill that earlier passed the Senate. House Democrats supported this amendment in the hope that shunting the legislation to a conference committee would delay passage beyond the legal deadline for the referenda to get on the March 14th ballot. This maneuver forced House Republicans to choose between a possible fatal delay in the legislation or casting an embarrassing vote against school prayers. Of course the straw ballot legislation did achieve final passage before the deadline.

The statements read as follows: *Busing,* Do you favor an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would prohibit forced busing and guarantee the right of each student to attend the appropriate public school nearest his home?; *Education,* Do you favor providing an equal opportunity for equal education for all children regardless of race, creed, color or place of residence and oppose a return to a dual system of public schools?; *Prayer,* Do you favor an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to allow prayer in the public schools?

[2] Because some returned questionnaires were only partially completed, the N's reported below vary slightly from 54 to 58, depending on the question.

votes on whether the busing referendum should be held. Quite conceivably, their expectation of the outcome of a busing referendum influenced their votes on whether such a referendum would take place.

One improvement of the present study over previous attempts to assess legislators' ability to gauge constituency opinion is that here we compare "hard" data regarding the actual distribution of constituency opinion with legislators' predictions of the exact percentage point outcomes. By contrast, Miller and Stokes relied on estimates of constituency opinion based on a survey with small N's per district. Moreover, their district estimates and obtained congressional perceptions did not have a common metric, thus preventing assessment of whether congressmen perceived their constituents' opinions as more liberal or more conservative than they actually were. The previous studies based on referendum predictions obviously contained accurate estimates of constituency opinion, but only assessed whether the legislators could predict their constituents' majority vote rather than how closely they could predict the precise percentage point outcome, as is done here.

The Accuracy of Legislators' Predictions

Nearly all legislators correctly predicted the majority position in both district and state on each issue, but since each proposition carried statewide and in virtually every district, this is hardly a stiff test of their ability to predict public opinion. Because they are expressed in terms of percentage point forecasts, the legislators' predictions of the referendum outcomes can be assessed according to a variety of criteria. One test is to compare the legislators' *average* estimates with the actual statewide returns, in order to see whether the "consensus" estimate was biased toward general overestimation or underestimation of support for any of the three statements. A second test is simply to examine the correlations between predicted and actual constituency opinion, in order to see whether the legislators who predict the highest home-district support for a given statement actually represent the most pro-statement constituencies. Finally, a third test is to examine the median errors of the predictions on the three issues—a convenient summary measure of the accuracy of individual predictions. It should be noted that these tests need not yield identical results. For example, the opinion-prediction correlations might be very high, yet systematically biased in one direction, yielding a high median error.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the three kinds of tests. The accuracy of the *average* estimates can be assessed from the data in the first four rows of the table. It can be noted that the average estimates of statewide opinion

TABLE 1

Summary Measures of Actual and Predicted Referendum Outcomes

		Anti Busting	Pro School Prayer	Pro Equal Education
Predicted District Vote (% for Statement)	Mean	74.1	76.1	77.6
	(Standard Dev.)	(10.8)	(15.1)	(14.6)
Actual District Vote (% for Statement)	Mean	74.3	78.8	78.7
	(Standard Dev.)	(6.3)	(6.8)	(3.5)
Predicted Statewide Vote (% for Statement)	Mean	73.1	75.5	75.5
	(Standard Dev.)	(9.2)	(14.8)	(15.4)
Actual Statewide Vote (% for Statement)		74.1	79.4	78.6
Correlation between Predicted and Actual Vote (r)		+.51	+.42	+.08
Median Error of District Prediction		6%	9%	12%

were quite close to actual statewide opinion; also, the average estimates of home-district percentages were very similar to the averages of actual district opinion. Thus, there was no systematic tendency for the legislators to see public opinion as either more liberal or more conservative than it actually was. But the accuracy of the legislators' collective judgment of public opinion masks considerable variation in the individual estimates. For example, on each issue the standard deviation of legislator *estimates* of both state and district opinion were greater than the standard deviation of *actual* district opinion.

Despite the considerable variation of the home-district estimates, the correlations between these estimates and actual constituency opinion are all positive, and on two of the three issues substantially so. As the fifth row of Table 1 shows, Pearson product-moment correlations between predicted and actual district voting were +.51 on busing, +.42 on school prayer, but only +.08 on equal education. This same relative ordering of the issues is found in the examination of median error: predictions were most accurate on the highly publicized busing issue, next best on prayer, and weakest on the apparently hard-to-figure equal education vote. Perhaps this is indication that legislators are best able to pick up grass roots opinion when it is most vocally expressed.

Previous District Voting and Referendum Outcomes and Predictions

How impressed we ought to be with the positive correlations between predicted and actual district opinion may depend on how "predictable" district referendum results were from such handy indicators as past voting behavior. If the legislator can accurately gauge his district's opinion on an issue from its history of voting for liberal or conservative candidates, less skill is involved than if previous district voting does not provide a meaningful augury of the district's response to the issue. Little is known about whether legislators do infer constituency preferences from their past votes, or even whether in fact past election results can provide accurate predictions of referendum voting. Accordingly, we attempted to find out whether the legislators' predictions of the constituencies' referendum voting followed previous election returns and whether in fact previous election returns could predict how the districts voted on the three referendum issues. For this exercise, we employed two indicators of previous district voting: Askew's percentage of the 1970 general election vote for governor, and a slightly more complicated measure based on the 1968 presidential vote. This latter index, intended as a rough measure of district "liberalism," is Humphrey's vote

percentage minus Wallace's vote percentage.[3] The Askew vote and the Humphrey minus Wallace vote provide independent means of assessment since they correlate (for the districts of our responding legislators) at only +.05.

On the antibusing proposition, it is reasonable to assume that predictions of high support would correlate negatively with both the Askew vote and the Humphrey minus Wallace vote. These variables could in fact account for almost half the variance in the *actual* antibusing vote in the constituencies of our responding legislators, as the following regression equation shows:

$$\hat{B}_{actual} = 80.9 - .11A - .19H \qquad R = .67 \qquad R^2 = .44 \qquad (1)$$

where $\hat{B}_{actual}$ is the actual antibusing vote, A the Askew vote, and H the Humphrey vote minus the Wallace vote (all in percentages). This regression equation provides the best fitting linear additive formula the legislators could have used if they were to predict their districts' antibusing vote solely from our two indicators of previous voting.

For comparison with equation (1), we can infer the typical prediction formula legislators did employ by generating a regression equation to predict legislators' *predictions* from their districts' Askew and Humphrey vote. Actually, this equation predicting legislators' predictions of the antibusing vote is quite similar to equation (1), except that the legislators apparently overestimated the proper weight of the Askew vote. This equation takes the form:

$$\hat{B}_{predicted} = 86.6 - .21A - .18H \qquad R = .43 \qquad R^2 = .18 \qquad (2)$$

Although the intercepts and regression coefficients of the two equations are similar, equation (2) accounts for only a small portion ($R^2 = .18$) of the variance in legislators' predictions. This suggests that *individual* legislators' assessments of how past voting would relate to the antibusing vote varied considerably from the average, fairly accurate, formula estimated by equation (2). Or, some legislators may have used a formula like equation (2) while others did not. Also, much of the unexplained variance in legislators' predictions may represent their responses to other possible predictors of the antibusing vote besides previous election returns.

We can ask whether the legislators' reliance on the cue of their districts' previous voting behavior fully accounts for the positive relationship between their antibusing predictions and the actual results or whether their additional reliance on factors besides past voting also contributed positively to their prediction ability. If legislators were able to judge constituency antibusing

[3] Because of a strong negative correlation (–.68) between the Humphrey vote and the Wallace vote, the "effects" of these two variables could not be disentangled.

sentiment solely from past voting, then the correlation between their predictions and actual outcomes would vanish when the indicators of past voting are controlled. But if legislators' responses to nonelectoral cues helped to increase the accuracy of their predictions, then the predicted and actual vote ought to remain positively correlated when past voting is controlled. With the Askew and Humphrey vote held constant, the relationship between the actual and predicted antibusing vote is a partial correlation of +.35, down slightly from the simple correlation of +.51. Thus on the antibusing proposition we infer that legislators enhanced their predictions of district behavior not only from how the district had voted in past elections, but also from the other district characteristics that they took into account.[4]

On school prayer, the Askew and Humphrey votes together account for almost all the variance in the actual straw ballot results:

$$\hat{P}_{actual} = 88.4 - .16A - .27H \qquad R = .90 \qquad R^2 = .81 \qquad (3)$$

The equation estimating legislators' *predictions* on school prayer takes a very similar form, but almost four-fifths of the variance goes unexplained:

$$\hat{P}_{predicted} = 82.2 - .10A - .33H \qquad R = .46 \qquad R^2 = .22 \qquad (4)$$

Since the regression estimates in equation (4) closely approximate those in equation (3), the results are as if legislators typically applied the correct electoral formula to predict the prayer vote. But the inability of previous voting to account for much variance in legislator *predictions* suggests that legislators also took into account additional district cues that bore no relationship to past voting patterns. Unlike the results on busing, past voting fully accounts for the correlation between predicted and actual voting on school prayer, since the correlation plunges from the original +.42 to a partial correlation of only +.03 when the Askew and Humphrey votes are controlled. Apparently, then, the legislators were not able to improve their predictions of district prayer outcomes on the basis of sources beyond the powerful cue of prior district voting.

On equal education, the regression equations estimating the actual and predicted straw ballot vote for the pro-integration proposition are:

[4] Just as predictions and actual voting remain positively correlated with past voting taken into account, so do predictions and past voting also remain correlated when the actual outcomes are held constant. This pattern holds for all three issues, and allows us to reject the argument that past voting did not have a direct impact on the predictions beyond that contributed by legislators correctly anticipating outcomes which in turn were correlated with previous voting.

$$\hat{E}_{actual} = 85.8 - .12A + .06H \qquad R = .58 \quad R^2 = .33 \qquad (5)$$

$$\hat{E}_{predicted} = 61.8 + .27A + .04H \qquad R = .23 \quad R^2 = .05 \qquad (6)$$

Equation (5) shows district support for Askew to be a predictor of voter *opposition* to this "liberal" proposition, possibly because the Republican areas that opposed Askew in 1970 contained many transplanted northern Republicans who, while opposing busing, found it relatively easy to give lip service support to equal education. But the companion equation estimating legislative predictions suggests that legislators expected high Askew support to signify strong support for the equal education proposition. The hindsight provided by equation (5) shows this expectation to be wrong. Thus, the legislators' mistaken expectation that Askew's strength would correlate with the equal education vote may have been a major source of the considerable inaccuracy of the predictions on this issue. Indeed, the legislators would have predicted more accurately if they had disregarded the cue of previous district voting, since with the two voting indicators controlled the correlation between the actual and predicted equal education vote rises from the original +.08 to the slightly less feeble +.21.

The foregoing statistical exploration has yielded no common interpretation for all three issues. On busing, Florida legislators behaved as if they obtained useful cues for predicting the referendum outcome from the district's past voting behavior, but also from other sources. On school prayer, Florida legislators apparently underestimated the extent to which the available cue of past district voting could almost entirely account for district-to-district variation in the referendum vote. On equal education, legislator misinterpretation of how referendum results would relate to past voting may have contributed to the faulty predictions. Overall, we can observe that on each issue the legislators' predictions were less accurate than the regression equations predicting the referendum results from previous district voting.

Which Legislators Predicted Best?

On each issue, the legislators varied in their ability to predict their constituents' referendum vote. An attempt was made to account for this variation; that is, to see whether some kinds of legislators were better predictors than others. We hypothesized that two types of legislators who would be better than average assessors of constituency opinion would be those who saw their legislative roles as instructed delegates and those with the most legislative experience. Self-perceived delegates, so we thought, would be good predictors because they presumably are more preoccupied with con-

stituency opinion than are self-designated trustees. The greater experience of veteran legislators, we thought, would make them superior to relative newcomers as predictors of constituency opinion.

We defined veteran (or "senior") legislators as those with at least two prior two-year terms, and "junior" legislators as those with no more than one prior term. Role orientations were obtained from interviews with the legislators conducted a year earlier by one of the authors as part of a different project. From these earlier data we were able to classify most of the legislators who responded to our preelection questionnaire as either self-described trustees, politicos, or delegates. The distribution of role orientations was similar to that found in other legislatures–trustees predominant (59 percent), then politicos (31 percent), and delegates (10 percent) least frequent (Erikson and Luttbeg, 1973, p. 262). In the analysis we combined the politicos with the delegates in order to achieve cell entries of adequate size.

The relative accuracy of the predictions of constituency opinion for the different groups of legislators was assessed from a variety of indicators such as the within-group correlations between the predicted and actual vote, the groups' median errors, and the groups' mean errors. Where any of these indicators show any appreciable difference, it is in the opposite direction of that hypothesized. That is, the junior legislators and the trustees–and the junior trustees in particular–appear to be the most accurate assessors of constituency opinion. We show this in Table 2, using what is perhaps the most comprehensive indicator of a group's prediction ability–the group's mean percentile error. On each issue, the junior trustees have the smallest error on the average, and on two of the three issues the senior delegates have the largest error. The differences are clearest on the overall average percentile error. Indeed, based on the overall index, 9 of the 11 junior trustees but only 1 of the 7 senior delegates are above the fiftieth percentile in ability to predict constituency opinion.

Although the "common sense" expectation that delegates would know constituency opinion the best was not supported by the data, this "negative" result has also been reported elsewhere. Hedlund and Friesema found that among their Iowa legislators the trustees were more accurate in predicting majority constituency opinion than were the delegates. Ad hoc explanations for this finding, now replicated, are, of course, available. For example, the most politically perceptive legislator may be the one most likely to see his proper role as an independent trustee of the public interest rather than a follower or instructed delegate (Friesema and Hedlund, 1974). In any case, we are left with the irony that the legislators who claim to pay the greatest attention to constituency preferences appear to be the least able to determine what their constituents want.

TABLE 2

Mean Percentile Accuracy of District Vote Predictions, by Role Orientation and Seniority[a]

	(N)	Busing	Prayer	Equal Education	Three Issues Combined[b]
Delegates (and Politicos)	(20)	50.1	35.3	46.5	40.0
Trustees	(28)	50.7	53.7	51.4	53.5
Seniors[c]	(27)	42.0	48.7	48.1	43.5
Juniors[c]	(29)	57.4	51.2	51.8	56.0
Sr. Dels. (and Pols.)	(7)	38.7	42.2	38.8	35.2
Sr. Trustees	(17)	42.8	46.4	48.0	43.5
Jr. Dels. (and Pols.)	(13)	56.3	31.6	48.4	42.5
Jr. Trustees	(11)	62.9	64.9	54.2	69.1

[a]Based on all 56 legislators by whom district predictions on all three issues were completed.

[b]The combined index is obtained by summing the three original percentile scores for each legislator and transforming these sums into new percentiles.

[c]Seniors are defined as legislators in at least their third consecutive term. Juniors are first and second termers.

Perceived Constituency Opinion and Roll Call Voting

From their behavior on roll calls concerning the placement of the anti-busing proposal on the ballot, we can rank legislators' positions on the procedural question of whether Florida voters were to be given the chance to vote on this issue. While virtually all Republicans in the legislature supported the straw vote, Democrats were divided, with those identified with the party's most "liberal" wing most opposed. We ranked all Democratic legislators who responded to our survey along a two-item cumulative scale of roll call support for the busing referendum.

Although the Democratic legislators' roll call votes on the busing referendum were technically not votes on the substance of the busing issue, we might expect that those who perceived the strongest local opposition to busing would feel most pressured to vote in favor of holding the straw ballot. Roll call support for the referendum did correlate positively with *expected* district antibusing vote, but only at +.15, which was even less than it correlated with the *actual* district antibusing vote (+.33). An additional

correlation of interest is a *negative* −.34 relationship between roll call support for the referendum and the expected *statewide* antibusing vote. Apparently, the stronger the Democratic legislator foresaw the antibusing vote to be statewide, the more he wanted to keep the issue off the ballot. The relative effects of expected district voting, actual district voting, and expected statewide voting on the Democratic legislators' roll call votes can be estimated via regression analysis. The equation (in standardized form) is:

$$\hat{B}_{rc} = .16B_{da} + .20B_{dp} - .39B_{sp} \qquad R^2 = .219 \quad (N = 33) \qquad (7)$$

where B_{rc} = the legislator's roll call support for the busing referendum,
B_{da} = the actual district antibusing vote,
B_{dp} = the predicted district antibusing vote, and
B_{sp} = the predicted statewide antibusing vote.

It may seem worthwhile to repeat this analysis for separate subsamples of trustees and delegate-politicos, on the grounds that the trustees ought to be the least sensitive to perceived district opinion. The results of such a replication would be unreliable, however, due to very small N's and diminished degrees of freedom. Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, delegates and politicos' roll call behavior varied little on the busing referendum, clustering at the

TABLE 3

Roll Call Support for Busing Referendum by Role Orientation (Democrats Only)

Roll Call Support	Trustees	Delegates and Politicos
Low	30%	11%
Medium[a]	40	44
High	30	44
	100%	100%
N =	(20)	(9)
Gamma = +.36[b]		

[a]"Medium" supporters voted for final passage of the referendum but opposed the referendum on the majority of a series of obstructionist amendments and procedural votes.

[b]With Republicans included, gamma rises to +.54.

pro-referendum extreme. This greater support for the referendum among delegates and politicos is of interest in itself. There are two plausible explanations. First, since district sentiment was generally perceived to be strongly antibusing, the direction of district pressure on legislators who behave as instructed delegates would generally be pro-referendum. As a second possibility, when voting the legislators may have responded more to their attitudes toward public referenda than to their positions on the substantive issue of busing. If so, it could be that delegates were compelled by their "philosophy" of representation to allow the public to speak its mind via a referendum, while trustees were more propelled by their "philosophy" to look unfavorably upon a public referendum.

Conclusion

Before a legislator casts a roll call vote or takes a public stance on an issue, he must pause to consider how his constituents will react to his behavior. How do their opinions divide and how much do they care about this issue? Can he afford politically to vote his own preference or must he respond to constituency pressure? For the legislator, answering these questions is no easy task, particularly when (as still is usually the case) he cannot consult reliable opinion polls for guidance. Many of the legislator's available cues for deciphering constituency opinion can be biased—for example, the content of his mail, or the advice of the constituents he selectively talks to. Also of uncertain validity are the additional cues of the constituency's demography and its past voting habits. With many variables to take into account, and little available feedback regarding their prediction accuracy, the successful politician's grasp of what will please his constituency can only be described as a delicate art rather than as a science.

This study has examined how Florida legislators predicted constituency opinion as manifested in constituency voting behavior on three "straw ballot" referendum propositions. From our findings, how might one generalize about how accurately legislators can predict public opinion? Although our legislators cannot be described as predicting the percentage point outcomes with pinpoint accuracy, their performances on our quiz were, by some available standards, quite good. For example, we were impressed that disregarding misestimates by individual legislators, the consensus estimates within the legislature of statewide and home district opinion were very close to the mark. Of course, averaging perceptions enhances accuracy by cancelling out individual mistakes. But it did not have to turn out this way; errors in prediction can go systematically in the same direction, biasing the net estimates (and possibly policy decisions) in a conservative or liberal direction.

Some praise can also be extended to the legislators' *individual* predictions of the busing and prayer vote, although not to their predictions of the equal education vote.

We have also seen that in the absence of clear communications from their constituents, the district's voting history could be used by the legislators to learn constituency preferences. Legislators' perceptions of constituency views also correlate with previous district voting, which suggests that legislators may indeed be using this device. Even were legislators to monitor previous voting by their districts, they would only learn their district's likely position relative to other districts, not the actual magnitude of support. But in the absence of other clues, feedback by this channel can be useful.

Two of the three referenda—school prayer and school integration—dealt with constitutional questions on which there was little chance the legislators would have to react. Thus, defects in their predictions on these issues may be excused on the grounds that the legislators had little need to follow opinion closely. But the third issue, busing, though presented as a matter for constitutional change, was one on which the legislators had cast some highly publicized roll call votes. Certainly the process of having to decide whether to place the busing issue on the ballot could have sensitized the legislators to public opinion on the issue. Thus the pressure on the legislators to respond on busing may be one reason why their predictions of public opinion were better on busing than on the other two issues. Possibly the accuracy of the busing predictions is typical of the accuracy of legislator perceptions of district opinion when the issue is salient to constituents and also before the legislature for decision.

These data give some confidence that the opinions of the public are at least present in the perceptions of legislators when they make public policy on issues that are salient to the public and on which the public is vocal. Few public issues, however, approach "busing" in clarity of alternative positions or in intensity of concern. Except for such exceptional issues, we have little theory that would predict the circumstances in which the views of the public are accurately perceived by public decisionmakers.

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