

In Defense of Public Opinion Polling by Kenneth F. Warren. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 2001. 384 pp. \$26.00.

Kenneth Warren acknowledges up front that he is a pollster and that he is out to write a book to change people's minds. His effort is commendable, but it is directed to a lay audience and falls short in a number of areas of satisfying a more sophisticated reader. In his epilogue, he describes his effort as a "sympathetic defense," as one would expect from a practicing pollster. The difficulty of such a task is highlighted in Chapter 10, which takes a look at the accuracy of preelection polls in the 2000 election. Warren's review is a more gentle review of the pollsters' performance than, for example, the critiques that appear after each election in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. While the comparison between national and state polls and those for offices other than president are laudable, the emphasis on the magnitude of errors without discussion of their direction or the use of final estimates from tracking polls that do not include the widely discussed variability in the Gallup tracking poll for CNN/*USA Today* from Labor Day to Election Day are significant omissions.

The discussion of more general issues such as the media's love/hate relationships with polls are very well done. Warren describes in detail both the individual and institutional imperatives that draw journalists to polls but that also make good reporting difficult. His experience in the business makes him a good judge of good and bad polls, and he devotes considerable attention to the discussion of good and bad practices, especially shopping mall polls, media call-in polls, biased interest group-polls, and push polling, a campaign strategy where negative persuasion phone calls are made under the guise of a poll. The conclusion that well conducted polls produce good data but poorly conducted polls do not seem self-evident, although the number and type of examples that Warren cites are very illustrative. The cartoons interspersed in the text are more of a distraction than a contribution to the story he wants to tell.

This book provides a good introduction to the contemporary debate that rages about the appropriate role of polls in a democratic society, including how they can contribute to the process of democratization in political systems undergoing change. It is best suited to a reader who has not had much previous exposure to these issues rather than to a more knowledgeable reader.

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