

outcomes of votes for two controversial referendum issues in Oregon in 1982. (The issues dealt with land use planning and property tax limitations.) This result is not surprising. The general public is best surveyed for their intentions on issues, not for their opinions as to which position will win.

The paper provides support for the 'looking-glass effect'. This states that when one looks out to see the world, a reflection of one's own beliefs is seen. Others are seen to have the same beliefs. I am not sure where this term originated, but evidence on the effect goes back at least to Hayes (1936). Thus, of those who voted 'yes' on one of the issues examined by Lemert, 74% predicted that it would pass. Of those who voted 'no', only 19% predicted that it would pass. (The record of voting was obtained from interviews with voters as they left the voting booths.) These results are almost as extreme as those obtained by Hayes. Of course, the looking-glass effect is not surprising either, but it does indicate the dangers in trying to use participants in a process as experts about that process.

Another interesting aspect of the study is that people often violate the 'law of conservatism for forecasting'. This states that the greater the uncertainty you face, the more conservative you should be when making a forecast. For example, if you were asked to make a forecast about a vote when there are two possible outcomes, you should use the minimax criterion and select a 50–50 split if uncertainty is extremely high. (This minimizes the largest error that you could make.) But Lemert found that voters, who face much uncertainty about the intentions of other voters, made much more extreme predictions than did the politicians. On the tax issue, none of the politicians' predictions fell outside the 40–60% range, while 30% of the voters' prediction fell outside.

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Reference

Hayes, S.P., Jr., 1936, The predictive ability of voters, *Journal of Social Psychology* 7, 183–191.

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Steven J. Rosenstone, John Mark Hansen, and Donald R. Kinder, Measuring change in personal economic well-being, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50 (1986) 176–192.

This paper shows that more reliable data can improve the estimation of a relationship. Reliability of the measure of economic well-being was improved in a number of ways. The authors then examined the effect on the estimate of the relationships to three variables: evaluations of the nation's economy, evaluations of Ronald Reagan's performance as president, and the vote choice between Reagan and Mondale. Here are some of the findings:

- (1) The change from a 3-point to a 5-point scale for economic well-being had a strong impact on the estimated relationships.
- (2) The use of four rather than one item to measure economic well-being produced only minor gains (beyond the 5-point scale).
- (3) Behavioral measures had no effect once the attitudinal measures of economic well-being had been taken into account.
- (4) The use of questions less dependent on memory (asked about the last six months rather than the past year), produced no further gain.

The authors claim that the use of five rather than three categories for the economic well-being question produced 'startling' results; the estimated relationships were almost twice as large. Most