

There are two especially central problems that the authors cannot overcome. First, the authors' tendency to favor abstractions over specifics leads them to overlook or downplay evidence that executive power has been limited by the rule of law. The Supreme Court blocked the Harry Truman administration from seizing steel factories during the Korean War (the Truman administration made essentially the same argument to the District Court about executive power that the authors endorse); the Court and Congress used legal allegations and conclusions to effectively force Richard Nixon out of office; the Court compelled Bill Clinton to sit for a deposition. The authors do not precisely date the alleged demise of the rule of law, but even more-recent examples of the rule of law's continued relevance exist. In 2004, Department of Justice attorneys forced the George W. Bush administration to modify a secret surveillance program after the attorneys, who believed the program was illegal, threatened to resign.

In addition, the authors fail to identify any specific examples showing how the political checks they tout have actually succeeded in limiting executive power. In one dizzying episode, they conclude that the main political "check" they offer, the president's interest in credibility, will actually operate to increase executive power: "The very point of demonstrating credibility is to encourage voters and legislators to *increase the discretionary authority of the executive*, where all will be made better off by doing so" (p. 141, emphasis added).

This is a revealing statement. The authors seem more interested in making the case for unfettered executive power than in identifying real limits. The authors conclude by dismissing critics of legally unrestrained executive power as "tyrannophobes" (p. 176–205) who overstate the possibility of dictatorship in the United States. It is true that the United States has never had a Hitler or a Stalin, but there are multiple examples of presidential power being used to infringe on individual rights—either when presidents acted alone or with support from the other branches of government. Given American history, it seems a bit Panglossian to dismiss concerns about the dangers of excessive executive power as blithely as the authors do.

CHRIS EDELSON
American University

American Public Opinion and Health Care by Robert J. Blendon, Mollyann Brodie, John M. Benson, and Drew E. Altman. Washington, DC, CQ Press, 2011. 530 pp. \$135.00.

The authors and their able chapter collaborators, Claudia Deane, Tami Buhr, Elizabeth C. Hamel, John M. Connelly, Caroline S. Gutierrez, Tara Sussman Oakman, Gillian K. Steelfisher, Melissa J. Herrmann, Sara Bleich, Kathleen J. Weldon, and Kalahn Taylor-Clark have provided an enormous service to students of public opinion in general and anyone interested in the public's familiarity with, and perceptions and attitudes toward a comprehensive range of health care

subjects and issues in the United States. This volume, in tandem with articles over the years in “The Polls-Trends” section of the journal *Public Opinion Quarterly*, provides a quick and direct way to learn about the full history of public opinion concerning health and medical care topics. It is packed with trend and other tables as a source for further analyses of these data. Moreover, each chapter provides a concise, engaging, and balanced summary and analysis of the data covering each topic. As increasing public opinion data have become available, this book joins only a handful of other volumes that provide similar compilations of public opinion data and commentary on particular sets of national issues. In the case of health care, the first chapter takes note that the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research’s iPOLL database during the last two decades has contained *each year*, on average, responses to more than 2,000 survey questions on health and health care topics.

Bringing many medical-related concerns together, the book’s chapters cover trends in confidence in government and health care institutions, including trust in doctors; attitudes toward the health care system, government spending and priorities, and evaluations of different aspects of medical care; perceptions and opinions of costs; health care insurance and the issue of expanding coverage; Medicare and Medicaid; the provision of prescription drugs; the quality of health care; medical errors; beliefs, perceptions, and opinions concerning HIV/AIDS; attitudes toward abortion; stem cell research and cloning; end-of-life-care and euthanasia; public attitudes toward obesity and weight loss; infectious diseases, including pandemic flu, Mad Cow Disease, the West Nile Virus, SARS, anthrax, and smallpox; and the public’s perceptions and views toward racial and ethnic differences in health care.

Separate chapters devoted to racial and ethnic differences, comparing opinions of blacks, Latinos, and non-Hispanic whites toward health care policy and women’s perspectives on the health care system, provide good starting points that lead to many more issues for which comparisons can be made and bring into the picture other additional racial/ethnic subgroups and individuals with different sexual identities affecting how they perceive and receive medical care. The chapters on health care reform in Massachusetts and especially the final ones on partisan and electoral politics and the Barack Obama administration’s 2009–2010 successful health care reform effort represent the start of important public opinion research now underway in the United States in real time.

More books like *American Public Opinion and Health Care* should be written that vet, analyze, and attempt to make sense of and make accessible the increasing volume of opinion data that is collected and made available by different polling organizations. In that spirit, it is unfortunate that the book has been published thus far (August 2011) as an expensive, reference-volume-type hardback. The distribution of such a work should include paperback and e-book versions but also, ideally, a way of making individual chapters available online for readers interested in particular health care topics.

ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO
Columbia University