

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

would previously have been committed to institutions or compelled to take private classes.]

Meanwhile, state officials have reacted to falling test scores by drawing up stiffer competency tests for students and teachers, and setting detailed curriculum requirements. Today, a proposed California law would force teachers to spend 200 minutes per week on the arts. Other states are variously mandating stronger programs in alcohol-abuse education, vocational training, and ethnic history.

Atkin argues that added state requirements could narrow the range of serious subjects that local schools can offer. The problem will be exacerbated if public schools—now heavily dependent on aid from Washington—have to spend scarce funds on more special programs for the handicapped, the poor, and other federally selected students.

Repeal the PAA?

"Pseudo-Opinions on Public Affairs" by George F. Bishop, Robert W. Oldendick, Alfred J. Tuchfarber, and Stephen E. Bennett, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Summer 1980), Subscription Dept., Elsevier North Holland, Inc., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Pollsters have long suspected that some respondents give opinions on subjects they know nothing about. An experiment by University of Cincinnati researchers Bishop, Oldendick, Tuchfarber, and Bennett indicates that these suspicions are well founded.

The authors polled more than 1,800 Cincinnati-area residents in the summer and fall of 1978. In addition to asking about genuine domestic and foreign policy issues, the researchers sought reactions to a bogus, undefined "1975 Public Affairs Act" (PAA) to see how readily individuals took stands on unfamiliar issues. Some respondents were asked point-blank if the "Act" should be repealed. Others were first asked "filter" questions (e.g., "Where do you stand on this issue or haven't you thought much about it?"). Nearly 16 percent of the "unfiltered" respondents claimed to support the nonexistent PAA; 17.6 percent expressed opposition. Even in the filtered groups, 4.5 to 7.4 percent had an opinion, with pro and con sentiments split roughly 50-50.

Respondents who took stands on the PAA were far more likely than persons who admitted their ignorance to express views on real issues, such as affirmative action programs for blacks or tax cuts. And both PAA advocates and opponents tended to hold liberal views on domestic issues—though no such connection existed on foreign policy questions. (The neutral title of the "act" may explain the even pro-con division.)

The authors conclude: Surveys that fail to factor out ignorant respondents overstate public support for *specific* domestic social programs. However, they clearly reflect the public's attitudes toward government's role, in general.