



Public Opinion in Alabama: Looking Beyond the Stereotypes

Cal Clark, Don-Terry Veal

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The attitudes of individual citizens play a central role in a democracy. In the United States today, the two major parties are each associated with a broad set of policy positions representing the conservative and liberal political ideologies. The two major parties are becoming increasingly polarized on these ideologies between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. This book provides an in-depth examination of public opinion in a single American state, Alabama, to see whether the public opinion of general citizens follows this stereotype of ideological and partisan polarization. Alabama public opinion is analyzed on a fairly wide range of issues, including the quality of public officials, constitutional reform, the role of government in terms of taxes and overall spending, education, health care, religion in public life, crime, and immigration. Alabama is generally perceived as staunchly conservative politically and as a reliably 'red' Republican state in national elections. Yet, public opinion in Alabama is considerably more nuanced and complex than this stereotype in two distinct aspects. First, Alabamians are certainly conservative on many issues, but they are also liberal on a significant number of others. Second, the issue positions of the state's citizens are shaped by three different dynamics in terms of what factors influence specific attitudes. Furthermore a brief analysis of public opinion in the entire United States finds similar patterns. Thus, the current polarization in party politics does not necessarily reflect public opinion in its entirety, suggesting a need to transcend the competing conservative and liberal orthodoxies.

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