

MIDWEST MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

Greenville, SC 29604

The C-SPAN Networks
ATTN: Mr. Brian Lamb; Ste 650
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Dear Brian,

Today I received my copy of your 1993 U.S. Congress Handbook and out of the hundreds of books I own, I don't think I ever made such a cost effective purchase. It's wonderful! So much more than I was expecting! Thank you for the time and effort you put into creating it.

It is a coincidence I should receive my book today because only hours earlier, I thought about writing you with a suggestion I have -- only to dismiss it, thinking no one ever pays attention to letters from viewers. I'm going to trust your claim on page vii that every letter reaches management. Here goes:

Although I appreciate and enjoy the survey and reporting of constantly changing voter attitudes done by CNN, C-SPAN and various news magazines, you all seem to be missing something. During this time of great dissension between Congress and the Executive branch, it is not possible to ask a voter how they feel about a current issue without knowing who they are blaming/crediting with their dissatisfaction or delight.

For instance, in a survey centering on the President, a question such as, "How do you feel the economy is being handled?" seems to read "How do you feel the President is handling the economy?" When the current response is compared to one collected a couple of months earlier, it'll show a drop in his approval rating. But is it really? A person may approve of the President's action but still disapprove of the way the American economy is progressing.

There are too many dynamics at play to draw many conclusions from a response to a ambiguously phrased question. Only if all other factors had remained constant, would the drop indicate it is he and his actions which had fallen out of favor.

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A good example of this sort of thing occurred during the recent filibuster on the summer jobs bill. I both hoped and feared a pollster would call and ask how I felt about the situation. I hoped, because I wanted to express my outrage over the filibuster, but after seeing the way some survey questions were framed, I feared my answer might make it appear as though it was the filibuster, in which I was in favor.

How best could I answer a question such as "How do you feel the jobs bill is being handled?" Handled by whom? If I say "It's being handled well," does that mean the President's doing the best he can with a bad situation? Does my answer say I admire him for understanding the immediacy of the unemployment problem and the volatility of idle inner city youth? Or does my positive response say to the pollster how much I appreciate Bob Dole for maintaining the status quo and Republican minority for fighting to protect us against the cost of this bill?

Not only are the responses to queries such as this bound to be at least partially inaccurate, they cover the issue in a boringly statistical manner. Although asking only a single question is surly easiest for pollsters, their computers and maybe even reporters, the story lies in the reasons why --just as it did in the campaign!

Remember how you did polls during the campaign last year? If all you reported on was President Bush's approval rating, it would have been very dull. Nobody cared what his approval rating was until some savvy pollster started asking why and what all those other people think. Remember how interesting it became when the press gave respondents a choice, instead of asking just for a self standing percentage or a yes/no answer? It was amazing to learn how many of those people early in the campaign said they didn't know and didn't care! And how this group heated up the race toward the end when they were forced to make a decision. If the media hadn't discovered their existence, they could have inaccurately been attributed to one side or the other.

Back then, when we heard Clinton's numbers rose or fell, we (the viewers) didn't want to know by how many points, as much as we wanted to know who he was taking that support from or who he was losing it to. That's what transformed dry statistics into a story with dimension! Can't you do that now

by juxtaposing a (person or issue or group or clearly defined opposing position) question subsequent to any you want to ask?

If you agree with me and feel my suggestions have merit I hope you're willing and able to incorporate them into C-SPAN's current polling policy. These days, each time I hear a survey on the president, it's like hearing one shoe drop -- I'm always waiting for the second half of the story that gives me perspective by which to view the first half. I hope the next time C-SPAN reports on how the public feels the President is doing his job, you're also able to report how the public feels Congress is doing it's job!

Thank you for taking the time to consider my suggestions. If possible, I would appreciate a response. Keep up the great work!


President

May 14, 1993
