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"Foreign affairs are really domestic affairs—the most domestic of all our affairs," the British statesman Lord Curzon once said, "for they touch the life, the interest and the pocket of every member of the community."[1] Yet, the opinion of the public has rarely been invoked in diplomatic history, or by Curzon for that matter. Twentieth-century leaders presided over a wide range of foreign policy decisions and military operations with momentous consequences for people across the globe. At the same time, they faced a rapidly transforming public sphere based on new media technology and increasingly effective ways to launch popular campaigns, even across national borders. But did public opinion have any influence on diplomacy? How did public opinion constrain governments and, vice versa, how did governments evade, shape, and manipulate public opinion? What, if anything, is public opinion at all?

Daniel Hucker's new book explores these questions through five case studies which, despite promising a global perspective, centre on familiar topics of Western diplomacy: the 1919 peace conference, 1930s appeasement, the Vietnam War, the end of Apartheid, and European integration. Throughout these stories, most actors move within the common set of institutions in the metropole and they articulate, perhaps unsurprisingly, national interests and narratives. The disparity between global claims and national rhetoric becomes increasingly jarring in the second half of the book when, for example, the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) turns out to be a largely British affair and even refers to itself as a "truly national movement" (109). We know that there were similar protests elsewhere, such as in Eastern Europe or on the African continent itself, but, as so often in international history, the majority of the sources (and certainly those most easily available) tell the story from the perspective of Western capitals.[2] So while the case studies are useful, the book's subtitle is somewhat misleading.

These limitations in scope aside, the book makes an important and engaging argument. At the most basic level, it claims that public opinion did matter and that it mattered more than international historians have traditionally acknowledged. That is apparent in the various popular campaigns from 'hang the Kaiser' to 'leave the EU,' but perhaps even more in the government documents that demonstrate how prime ministers from David Lloyd George to David Cameron developed a relationship to public opinion, whether dismissive or welcoming. It also becomes clear how technological advances made it easier for opinions to be spread by citizens (other than newspaper moguls) and to be monitored by politicians and pollsters. But despite the availability of new tools for amplifying and measuring specific opinions, those tools were not necessarily used to an effective degree. The Vietnam War may have been the first war to have been screened live on TV, but it was not decided on TV, as Hucker reminds us. President Richard Nixon knew that the formation of public opinion was more

[1] Lord Curzon, Speech at the London Conservative and Unionist Association, 8 November 1922, quoted in G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919–24* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 187.

[2] Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner (eds.), *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: 'Forward to Freedom' in South Africa* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

complex and he deliberately removed the three TV sets from the oval office which his predecessor Lyndon B. Johnson had installed.

In other words, the relationship between public opinion and diplomacy was not a one-way road towards ever greater influence. Nor did the public evolve from a dangerous mob (known as the Almond-Lippmann consensus) to a well-educated and benign force.[3] Instead, as Hucker shows, public opinion unfolded in a variety of forms and across the political spectrum. By re-considering well-known diplomatic crises from this understudied angle, he convincingly challenges comfortable assumptions about the role of public opinion. Each chapter offers an innovative take on a classic topic of twentieth century international history. The British public's response to Versailles was more diverse than it has traditionally been portrayed—an argument which is akin to what Marc Trachtenberg has argued about the governments involved.[4] French reactions to German aggression in the 1930s were not as passive as has often been claimed. American opposition to the Vietnam War may not have been as widespread as is often assumed. International boycotts put more public pressure on Apartheid South Africa than has commonly been appreciated. And, finally, the 'permissive consensus' on European integration was dwindling since at least the 1990s, a trend that was widely underestimated and that helps to explain the Brexit drama. In short, the impact of public opinion depended on the particularities of each historical case.

That inevitably leads to more fundamental questions about what public opinion really is and how historians can gauge it. Hucker's introduction does an excellent job in framing these long-standing debates. It grapples with the old methodological problem that citizens do not usually display their private opinions in public and, even if they do, that aggregate indicators of public opinion are almost always biased. Sometimes they are commissioned by actors with vested interests and sometimes they ask the wrong question or fail to reveal people's genuine sentiments. What is more, public opinion is notoriously unstable, especially in the field of foreign policy.[5] In the most pessimistic view, one could doubt whether public opinion is a useful concept at all. But Hucker takes a pragmatic stance and focuses on public opinion as "published opinion" (4). As historians, he argues, we have to work with public opinion as it was available to historical actors via newspapers, pamphlets, and radio broadcasts—information that is now stored in the archives. "It is this public opinion, and arguably this public opinion alone, that assumes the role of historical actor," he argues (5).

There are several problems with this approach. One is the unreliability of published public opinion, which was most recently displayed in the Brexit referendum. The majority of the voters—not the majority of the electorate, as is claimed (133)—were in favour of leaving the EU *before* 23 June 2016. It would be odd to claim that their opinion only became a historical actor once the referendum results were published and the polls were proven wrong. Surely anti-EU sentiments existed prior to that day and, if measured more carefully, would help to explain a lot about British politics more generally. Actual opinions can differ decisively from published opinions and, as historians, we have to explain how the former lead to the latter. There are plenty of other historical examples where public opinion was not really published at all and yet where it evidently had an impact on foreign affairs—consider the opposition movements in Eastern Europe during the 1980s for example. One might object that what actually mattered was how governments perceived these opposition movements and how they were recorded in Stasi reports, but we know about the problems of these sources, too.

By relying on published (or archived) public opinion we tend to return to those familiar actors who claim to have a good grasp of public opinion but are actually much more taken up by their own agenda. In one passage discussing French public opinion on disarmament in August 1933, for example, Hucker cites a report by "the British," which turns out to be the

[3] Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36:4 (1992): 439-466.

[4] Marc Trachtenberg, "Versailles after Sixty Years," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17:3 (1982), 487-506.

[5] Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics (1964)," *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 18:1-3 (2006): 1-74, here 46-47.

personal impression of the British Ambassador in Paris (62). That diplomatic dispatches are good indicators of public opinion seems questionable, and, more generally, is it not clear how reliable men in positions of power are as sources of information. Focusing on their documents also risks, for example, buying too much into the image of President Woodrow Wilson as the "most prominent exponent" of new diplomacy (24). His actual stance was more complicated, as we know from internal conversations, such as a March 1917 cabinet meeting in which he admitted: "I do not care for popular demand. I want to do right, whether popular or not."[6]

To be sure, Hucker is aware of these problems. In fact, the way he deals with them is one of the strengths of this book. After all, we have to rely on something if public opinion is to feature more prominently in international history. Hucker's study invokes a range of understudied voices and indicators from the Union of Democratic Control to the AAM, from the first French opinion polls in 1938 to the latest Eurobarometer. The second chapter, for example, does an admirable job of outlining the French newspaper scene in the inter-war period. It also draws on cultural sources, such as cinema and radio, to show that upbeat productions were commercially more successful than the now-famous pacifist ones, such as the film *La Grande Illusion* (1937). However, it often remains unclear how widely these media productions really circulated. What does it mean, for example, if "only 15% of the French population were radio listeners" in the mid-1930s (57)? Can we not assume that information spread more widely through households and other networks? How exactly were opinions transmitted? Who set the agenda and who followed suit? Sociologists have studied the mechanics of opinion formation for decades.[7] They have suggested a two-step flow of communication model via opinion leaders, which for historians means having to identify opinion leaders and to access their archives. There are numerous potential opinion leaders that receive only cursory attention in the book, including churches, trade unions, social clubs, grassroots movements, local politics, schools and universities, theatres, and corporate leaders. Future historians could be even more ambitious in piecing together the evidence from these constituents of the public sphere.

Despite the efforts made in the five case studies, we are often left with the somewhat disappointing conclusion that, while there were "numerous other factors [...] public opinion's role merits recognition" (131). That seems like a meagre result. Why was it, for example, that the AAM took several decades to take off? Why were anti-EU sentiments stronger in some places than in others? Without further discussion of the extent to which public opinion mattered, such statements remain assertions rather than piercing analysis. Some evaluative statements are almost tautologically broad, such as the observation that "French opinion was never unanimous" (71). Inversely, the author is at his best when he discusses the plausibility of opinion polls during the Vietnam War, while openly addressing their limitations. That is the kind of probing analysis that makes this book worthwhile.

The chapter on Vietnam reveals another more general problem about public opinion research, particularly in foreign policy. The policy options at stake are almost always more complex than polls can reflect. Elections and referenda, of course, are even more crudely binary. When pollsters asked in the 1960s whether the deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam was a mistake or not, that question not only oversimplified the possible exit strategies available, it was also linked to people's general satisfaction with the government—a dynamic that Nixon cleverly used to his advantage. The same problem arose in the Brexit referendum which asked a binary question about a much more complex international relationship. Yet, pollsters have continued to ask questions that are so detached from political realities that they almost ridicule the respondents. What does it tell us if, say, 62% of the people asked in a Eurobarometer survey think that the Common Market is "a good thing" (144)? The increasing fetishisation of data and often misguided belief in polls has added another layer of uncertainty for historians when studying decision-makers who spin results to their advantage.

[6] Diary of Josephus Daniels, 20 March 1917, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson,* vol. xli (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 445.

[7] Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New York: The Free Press, 1955).

The most important lesson about public opinion, however, is the frequently overlooked fact which Lucie Zimmern (the wife of British historian Alfred Zimmern) put very bluntly in her 1932 book: "most people do not think anything at all."[8] As we know from decades of social science research, people are very reluctant to form opinions on foreign policy, let alone stable ones.[9] So winning a diplomatic debate often depended on the extent to which people with no opinion were prompted to form some opinion. Indeed, that is the kind of apathy that we observe in the Vietnam story. Until 1964 some 63% of Americans payed "little or no attention" to the events in South East Asia (85). After 1965, that figure decreased steadily until only about a third expressed no opinion. Similarly, the 1985 Harris poll on whether Western governments should put more pressure on South Africa's Apartheid regime showed that 37% of the respondents were undecided, whereas a year later that figure decreased to 24% in favour of more pressure on Pretoria—still a disturbingly high number but certainly an indicator of how the silence of indifference was broken. A good illustration for this behaviour is what John Mueller has described as foreign policy issues sitting "on the shelf" from which the public picks the most salient ones (16). But Mueller's metaphor is, like much of the literature cited, from political science—it is a hypothesis that needs to be tested against the historical evidence.[10]

All these difficulties in grasping public opinion should not depress us but liberate us, Hucker concludes. Indeed, the great accomplishment of his book is not so much to emphasise the importance of public opinion in diplomacy *per se*, but to illustrate how historians can deal with its problems and pitfalls. Many of the issues discussed here are inherent to the subject of the book and, as such, are intended in the spirit of friendly debate rather than fundamental criticism. Ultimately, Hucker's book is an ambitious exploration of one of the trickiest fields of international history and an encouragement for more studies of this kind.

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[8] Lucie Zimmern, *Must the League Fail?* (London: Martin Hopkinson & Co., 1932), 13.

[9] See, for instance, Henry Durant, "Public Opinion, Polls and Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Sociology* 6:2 (1955), 149-158; Robert Axelrod, "The Structure of Public Opinion on Policy Issues," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31:1 (1967), 51-60; and George F. Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion: Fact and Artifact in American Public Opinion Polls* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

[10] John E. Mueller, "Public Opinion, the Media, and War," in Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).