

PUBLIC OPINION & VOTER OPINION

Class Notes

Brief review before even starting the PPT: political culture and political socialization and tie it in to public opinion

[slide 1] **Public Opinion**—what the public thinks about a particular issue or set of issues at any point in time.

[slide 2] **Public Opinion Polls**—how public opinion is measured. Defined as interviews or surveys with samples of citizens that are used to estimate the feelings and beliefs of the entire population.

[slide 3] Types of public opinion polls

- **Straw Polls**—unscientific survey used to gauge public opinion on a variety of issues and policies
- **Telephone Polls**—use of random-digit dialing to call people to ask them about their views on political issues
- **Exit Polls**—polls conducted as voters leave selected polling places on Election Day—helps media predict the outcomes of the race
- **Tracking Polls**—continuous surveys that enable a campaign or news organization to chart a candidate's daily rise or fall in support
 - Rasmussen
 - Gallup
- **Internet Polls**—scientific surveys of a particular sample of volunteers
 - Zogby
 - Harris Interactive
- **Push Polls**—polls taken for the purpose of providing information on an opponent that would lead respondents to vote against that candidate—misleading and sometimes even erroneous questions intended make an issue or candidate come across in a negative way.
 - Ex. Howard Stern excerpt start @ 0:49-2:11. Some of the members of the Howard Stern Radio Show recently interviewed Obama supporters in Harlem (as they typically do for the election)—listen to these misleading questions and the respondent's answers. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeJbOU4nmHQ>

[slide 4] Truman Picture—Who is this man? What does this picture have to do with polling? In 1948, incomplete data and miscalculations of election-night exit polls suggested Republican Thomas Dewey defeated incumbent Democratic Harry Truman. Some newspaper early editions went to press declaring Dewey the winner.

- Anecdote: In 2000, when I was at UF I recall driving home from the gym, listening to the news radio channel at about 8:30 and an announcement came on calling Florida for Gore. Having followed the election very closely I remember thinking it was way too early to make such a declaration in what had been a really close race. Well, we all know how Florida turned out in 2000...

[slide 5] Issues with polling

- **Sampling error**—polling error that arises based on the small size of the sample—the accuracy of the poll relies on the quality of the sample drawn, we want it to be representative of the population.
- **Biased questions** *we will go over in more depth in just a moment*
- **Bandwagon effect**—a shift in electoral support to the candidate whom public opinion polls report as the front-runner
- **Underdog effect**—favoring the candidate who is behind in the polls

[slide 6] Question bias

In 2000, President Clinton proposed setting aside approximately 2/3 of an expected budget surplus to fix the Social Security system. A study asked survey takers their opinion on how the surplus should be used. The phrasing of the questions mattered, yielding significantly different responses.

[slide 7] Skepticism slide

Pseudopolls—often found on websites, pseudopolls are not accurate measures of public opinion because respondents decided to participate rather than being selected scientifically.

[slide 8] Family Feud—the game show asks 100 people a question and two teams try to guess the most popular responses. Similarities: use of surveys, seeking popular answer so you assume the sample will represent the population, etc.

[slides 9&10] Recent Polls—info on the slides

[slide 11] Political Participation

- Voting—turnout highest for Presidential
- Contacting Officials/Lobbying

- Volunteering for a Campaign
- Participating in a Protest
- Making a Donation to a Candidate or Party
- Belonging to a political organization
- Participating in community affairs

[slide 12] eligibility to vote (on the slide)

[slide 13&14] Institutional Barriers to Voting

- Voting rights (women, African Americans)
- Legal segregation in history—poll taxes, literacy tests
- Registration requirements/deadlines—Registration issues are the #1 reason why people don't vote
 - Moving
 - Few states permit same day registration—voters must be deliberate and proactive
- Felons lose voting rights
- High number of elections at various levels
- Tuesday election day (during work week)
 - Early voting
 - Absentee voting
- Mobilization/GOTV
- **Motor Voter Law** (1993)—citizens could register to vote when they applied for a driver's license. Although millions of new voters registered (about 5-9 percent increase), there is little proof that the law increased voting rates, although some scholars believe the law is at least in part responsible for increased participation in recent elections. *NOT an obstacle to voting.*
- **Voter ID Laws**—some states have legislation requiring a voter to produce a photo ID at the polls. This issue is currently working itself through the court system—there are three states (WI, TX and PA) whose laws are on hold per a federal court
 - Democrats argue it unfairly targets/disenfranchises the poor and minorities (who typically vote Dem)
 - Republicans argue ID is required to drive cars, buy restricted products such as alcohol, board airplanes so it makes sense to require an ID to prevent fraud and protect the integrity of the voting process.

[slide 15] Demographic Barriers to voting

- Race/ethnicity
 - African Americans and Hispanics less likely to vote than whites.
 - African Americans trend Democratic
 - Hispanics in general, support Democrats 3 to 1, but Cuban-Americans are more identified with the Republicans
 - Asian American variability typically 60-40 Dem-GOP split
- Age—older people more likely than young people >>> 18-24 yr olds lowest
- Education—#1 factor influencing political participation is level of education/social class >>> college grads highest
- Gender—gender gap—men and women vote differently
 - Women tend to support Dems, men tend to support GOP
- Religion
 - those who are more religious more likely to vote
 - white evangelicals tend to support the Republican Party
 - Jews tend to support Democrats
 - Catholics who attend church 2x a week tend to support Republicans, 1x or less support Democrats
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[slides 16-18] graphs from the Census Bureau

[slide 19 &20] focuses on the youth vote (least likely to vote)

[slide 21] Other constituencies

- **Soccer moms** (1996)—middle-class, middle-aged, minivan driving women considered key in President Clinton's 1996 victory over Bob Dole
- **NASCAR dads** (2004)—small-town, conservative, middle-aged, blue-collar white men - were the crucial swing vote in 2004
- **Mama Grizzlies** (2010 midterms)—think Sarah Palin and her peeps, “common-sense conservative women, banding together and rising up” to form “an emerging, conservative, feminist identity.” Along with the tea-party in the 2010.
- **CENGA** generation (2012?)—*college-educated not going anywhere*, a phrase coined by John Zogby, those in their 20s who had high expectations for their future but are affected by the recession. They have high student loan debt but are unemployed or underemployed. Many are moving back in with their parents when this age group has been independent. Loss of confidence in institutions such as government, embracing Libertarian philosophies.

