

Professor Robert Weissberg
Public Opinion G53.2326 Fall 2006
Wed 2-4 Room 700
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Course Purpose

The topic of “public opinion” is vast, a huge literature, and ranges from grand philosophical expositions to arcane statistical analyses. This course takes a middle ground and examines various quandaries informing current research. It is *not* a seminar on how to conduct a survey, or how to extract wisdom from poll data, though both of these topics receive attention. Readings are generally non-technical and my explications stress the choices facing those grappling with survey data.

Requirements

The following books are to be purchased (as well as a course pack):

Fiorina, *Culture War?: The Myth of A Polarized America*
Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*
Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*

There will be a comprehensive take-home exam due on Dec. 18.

Sept 6. Introduction and Overview

Sept 13 Defining Public Opinion: Basic Issues

Price, *Public Opinion*, Chapters 2-3.
Weissberg, *Public Opinion and Popular Government*, pp. 9-16.

Sept 20 Defining Public Opinion: Problems of Measurement

Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapter 2.
Price, *Public Opinion*, Chapter 4.

Sept 27 Public Opinion Organizations

Bradburn & Sudman, *Polls and Surveys*, Chapter 4.
Weissberg, “Hidden from Scrutiny” in *Public Perspective*, May/June 2002, 7-10.

Oct 4 Public Opinion and Popular Control

Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power*,
Chapters 1-5.
Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Chapter 6.

Oct 11 Public Competence

Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapter 3.
Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, Chapters 1-2.
Nadeau *et. al.* “Innumeracy about Minority Populations, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 57 (1993), 332-47.

Oct. 18 Opinion Volatility

Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Chapters 4-5.

Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, Chapters 3, 6.

Oct. 25 Opinions and Behavior

Liska ed. *The Consistency Controversy*, Articles by DeFleur & Westie, La Pierre and Deutscher

Fishbein and Ajzen, *Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior*, Chapter 8.

Nov. 1 Opinion and Government Policy: Conceptual Issues

Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda" *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 56 (March 2003), 29-40.

Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapter 4.

Nov. 8 Opinion and Government Policy: Some Data

Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapters 4, 5

Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*, Chapter 4.

Nov. 15 The Interpretation of Poll Data

Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, Chapter 7.

Robinson and Meadow, *Polls Apart*, Chapter 4.

Herbst, *Reading Public Opinion*, Chapter 2.

Nov. 22 A Case Study in the Politics of Poll Interpretation

Fiorina, *Culture War?: The Myth of A Polarized America*.

Take Home Exam distributed

Nov/ 29 The Democratic Case for Polling

Warren, *In Defense of Public Opinion Polling*, Chapters 2, 11

Gallup, *A Guide to Public Opinion Polls*, 3-12, 81-93.

Dec. 6 The Democratic Case Against Polling

Robinson, *Mobocracy*, Chapters 1-3, 5.

Dec. 13 Going Beyond the Humdrum Poll

Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, Chapter 11.

Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapter 6.

Dec 18 Take Home Exam Due

