

This is a half semester course aimed at improving students' abilities to understand and critically evaluate surveys and public opinion polls, particularly those used to influence public policy. The course begins with an overview of contrasting perspectives on the role of public opinion in democratic governance. From here we look at the evolution of public opinion polling in the U.S. and other countries. We also examine procedures used for designing representative samples and conducting surveys by telephone, mail and the Internet. The class will visit a major polling operation to get a firsthand look at how they actually work.

Requirements

Students will be graded on the basis of their class participation (50%) and for the quality of their work on two take-home practical exercises (50%).

Readings: Readings will be on reserve at the Donald Stokes Library and available on the Internet through Blackboard. Note that all back issues of *Public Opinion Quarterly* from 1937-2000 are available at www.jstor.org.

Schedule

Thursday, September 14

1. The Evolution of Survey Research

Readings:

Rubenstein, Sondra Miller. 1995. *Surveying Public Opinion*. Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 49-83.

Tuesday, September 19

2. Public Opinion and Democracy

Contrasting views on the role of public opinion in shaping public policy

Readings:

Weissberg, Robert. "Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls." *Policy Analysis* No. 402. May 29, 2001.

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa402.pdf>

Newport, Frank. 2004. *Polling Matters*. New York: Warner Books. Pp. ix-xvi, 1-10.

Herbst, Susan. 2002. "How State-Level Policy Managers 'Read' Public Opinion." Pp. 171-183 in *Navigating Public Opinion*. Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook and Benjamin I. Page (eds.). Oxford University Press.

Thursday, September 21

3. Conducting Surveys in Other Countries

Readings:

Basañez, Miguel. 2002. "Public Opinion Research in Mexico."

The Standard. "A Question of Survey Abuse." September 20, 2005.

Pew Center for the People and the Press. "The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other." June 22, 2006.

Tuesday, September 26

4. Pre-election Polls

Readings:

- Weiner, Marc. "Pre-election Polls." *The Encyclopedia of Social Measurement, Vol. I*: Kimberly Kempf-Leonard, ed., San Diego: Academic Press, 2005, pp. 781-786.
- Lavrakas, Paul J. and Michael Traugott. 2000. "The Voter's Guide to Election Polls" Pp. 10-25, Pp. 29-38.
- Konner, Joan. 2003. "The Case for Caution: This System Is Dangerously Flawed." *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 67:5-18.
- Frankovic, Kathleen A. 2003. "News Organizations' Responses To The Mistakes Of Election 2000: Why They Will Continue To Project Elections." *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 67:19-31.

Thursday, September 28

5. Understanding and Measuring Opinions

Response inconsistency; ideology and identity; the don't know option; measuring intensity

- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 6-52.
- Moore, David W. 1997. "Split Sample Experiments: Affirmative Action vs. Special Preferences." *The Gallup Poll Monthly*, December 1997, pp. 25-27.

Tuesday, October 3

6. Introduction to Sampling

Probability sampling; dangers of non-probability sampling; obtaining and building sample frames; determining sample size; simple random samples

Readings:

- Salant, Priscilla and Don A. Dillman. *How To Conduct Your Own Survey*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 1994. Pp. 53-74.

Thursday, October 5

7. Complex Sampling and Weighting

Stratified sampling; multi-stage samples; cluster samples; design effects; weighting.

Readings:

- Henry, Gary T. 1990. *Practical Sampling*. Pp. 60-83.
- Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Survey: Sampling (<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/bsampdes.htm>)

Tuesday, October 10

8. Telephone Surveys

Readings:

- Lavrakas, Paul J. 1993. *Telephone Survey Methods*. Newbury Park: Sage. Pp. 98-123.
- Keeter, Scott, et al. 2000. "Consequences of Reducing Nonresponse in a National Telephone Survey." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64:125-148.
- Keeter, Scott. 2006. "The Impact of Cell Phone Noncoverage Bias on Polling in the 2004 Presidential Election." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70(1): 88-98.

Thursday, October 12

9. Mail and Internet Surveys

Readings:

- Dillman, Don A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Total Design Method*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Pp. 3-31.
- Brennan M. and J. Hoek. 1992. "The Behavior of Respondents, Nonrespondents, and Refusers across Mail Surveys." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56:4:530-5.
- Couper. Mick, Michael Traugott, and Mark Lamias. 2001. "Web Survey Design and Administration". *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65:230-253.

Tuesday, October 17

10. In person Interviewing

Readings:

- Gorden, Raymond L. 1980. *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques, and Tactics*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press. Pp. 125-143.
- Aquilino W.S. 1993. "Effects of Spouse Presence during the Interview on Survey Responses Concerning Marriage" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57(3):358-76.
- Villarroel, Maria A. et al. 2006. "Same-Gender Sex in the United States: Impact of T-ACASI on Prevalence Estimates." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70(2):166-196.

Thursday, October 19

11. Coding and Data Reduction

Readings:

- Salant and Dillman, pp. 175-200.
- Montgomery A.C. Crittenden K.S. 1977. "Improving Coding Reliability for Open-Ended Questions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 41:2:235-43.

Tuesday, October 24

12. Research Ethics

Protecting respondent confidentiality; disclosure; institutional oversight.

Readings:

- Seiber, Joel. 1992. *Planning Ethically Responsible Research. A Guide for Student and Internal Review Boards*. Newbury Park: Sage. Pp. 1-63.
- American Association for Public Opinion Research. "Best Practices for Survey and Public Opinion Research." (http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/best_practices_for_survey_and_public_opinion_research).
- Cohen, Patricia. April 8, 2000. "Oops, Sorry: Seems That My Pie Chart Is Half-Baked." *New York Times*. P. B7.

Thursday, October 26

13. The Politics of Census-taking

Readings:

- Anderson, Margo J. 1990. *The American Census: A Social History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Pp. 1-31, 213-240.
- Kerry, Peter. 2000. *Counting on the Census?: Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press. Pp. 121-177.