

Chapter 11 Outline: Public Opinion

- We vote for our own rulers.
- CA – votes for ref. & initiatives
- 24 of 50 states use some form of direct democracy
- Technology allows much more part- p.o. here & campaign 2007
- P.O. what public thinks
- P.O. polls – attempts to measure opinions scientifically.
- P.O. – important for proper functions of government.
- 1.) Role of PO in democracy for 2 reasons:
 - a.) normative – it should influence what government does
 - b.) empirical – lots of people behave as if it matters
- Why PO ought to matter? – Decl – TJ “We the people”; Gettysburg – Lincoln’s statement that government exists to serve the citizens; 17th amend – direct elect of senators; direct dem. – R, R, Initiative
- Key – “unless most participate in shaping policy – talk of dem is nonsense”.
- A Sample – portion of population; politicians or pollster surveys on an issue.
- Development of Modern Polls – straw into air – follows wind
- 48 – Truman vs. Dewey – Chicago Tribune
- 36 – Landon vs. FDR, Digest – car owner and telephone owners
- Quality of PO polls today – big business & relatively precise science
- Polls face two problems: 1.) getting good sample 2.) asking questions to yield valid results
- Size of sample: 1,000-2,000 – okay for all Am.
- Sampling error - +/- 3%
- Want reliability
- Today use sys. Random samples so no system biased like 48 Literacy Poll – all same chance of interviewed
- Many sample bias today = nonresponse
- Importance of asking right questions
- 3 Key points: 1.) ask about what they know & have thought about; 2.) questions not ambiguous, 1/3 Am. Didn’t think Holocaust had happened (1992 survey); 3.) beware of questions using words with loaded meaning
- Action – special preferences, order in which ask questions
- Types of Polls:
 - 1.) NAT – measure opinion in limited time, measure beliefs, attitudes of adults, the job president and congress are doing
 - 2.) Camp – done for candidates, state = benchmark, get baseline information, tracking – follows changes, exit & voters choice, VNS – premature call FL for Gore.
- Pseudo-polls – Question should we go to Iraq (CNN)
- Push polls – false information to use to get answers wanted on polls
- All elections accurate since 1980, except 2000 election
- 2 Views: 1.) ideal dem. Citizens; 2.) pol. Self interest – most of us between these two.
- Political Knowledge – 1.) not well informed politically.
- Ideology – set of ideas about pol, org. framework; position – Lib vs. Cons; place self along lib – cons scale; last 30 years – more cons than lib; moderates>Lib or Cons.

- Tolerance – key dem. Value, needed behave we can compromise; we all support values of free speech, rel, etc; but not apply to some particular situations (Nazi etc.); least tolerant – less ed, less pol. Sophistication; dem. Pol & tolerance increasing with education
- Participation – lots of scholars say we don't participate enough; among industrial countries in voting we are near bottom.
- Lots of obstacles to participate in USA; voting here tied to ed & SES – upper class especially young don't vote
- Sources of public opinion – pol soc, rel, age, geo. Region, etc.
- Rules of the Game – each new gen. picks up values & allegiances of previous gen; belief what is legitimacy; belief what is in leaders; willing to obey laws; value our system = pol. sys
- By agents = family, schools, churches, peers, media
- Agents – 1.) family before school – teaches nationalism, pol. comm., am. Is something special, get party ID
2.) Schools/ed – pledge, nat. heroes, citizenships, civics = Am. Obey the law, mock elec – class pres, etc.; activities upper grades.
3.) Peers – shared values & experiences define family, friends, soc. Groups, Same church, live same neighborhood. Peer pressure – “spiral of silence” Major opinion becomes exaggerated.
4.) Pol/Soc Events – 60 civil Rights/Vietnam, Watergate, Nixon resignation 1990 – Clinton impeached
- Sources of division of PO
 - pol soc – accepts games rules
 - 1.) Self – interest – econ ind. wellbeing
 - 2.) Ed – dem. Enlightenment, dem. Engagement, better ed>pol. values
 - 3.) Age – mid age most pol. active
 - 4.) Pol. generation – age influences; pol open = events shape us (gay rights, green)
 - 5.) Gender Gap – women are more lib. than men; women vote for dem. Candidates, more likely than men
 - 6.) Marriage Gap – different opinions of those married vs. never married
 - 7.) Race – is perennial cleavage in Am. Politics; African Americans more lib. on econmy and race issues lib. & whites; vary over perceptions of race in our society
- AA – are most solidly Dem group in Party ID and voting.
- 8.) Rel – deep moral convictions or values; what is morally right, think government policy – should reflect fundamental “family values” (e.g. abortion, organ transplant)
- 3 Major Faiths in America: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish
- Today = people who trad. Rel. is central role vs. those for whom it is less important
- Born Again – Cons. Positions of social issues – homosexuality and abortion
- Seculars – less fundamental
- Dem>Republicans
- Lib>Conservatives
- 9.) Geographic Region – congress responsible to different geographic regions – based opinons
 - Confederacy – more cons. Than rest of country, on civil rights
 - City Residents more liberal
 - Democratic residents more liberal
- The Citizen & PO – good citizens – come from ranks of well-off, well-educated; leave pol. information gathering to others = rational ignorance

- Shortcuts to Pol. knowledge – 1.) one shortcut – online processing information (not internet) 2.) 2 step flow of information – first opinion leader to us.
- Rational electorate – pol. deals with groups mostly not individuals
- Rel. Right – Rep; unions – Dem.
- State votes in their legs follow voters preferences; op. leaders – ed & wealthy
- PO is important in policymaking – politicians respond to it in various ways.
- Prime Examples are 1.) term limits 2.) balanced budget amendments
- PO – checked by House & Senate
- Majority Rule – can become tyranny of the majority
- Rule Pol. Today – pub IG's; SIG; reformers outside beltway