

Seminar on Public Opinion in the Media

SMP 895

Fall 2014

Mondays, 9 – 11:30 a.m.

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Course Description: In this seminar, we will study the nature and origins of public opinion and its representation through polls and surveys in the media. Beyond developing an understanding of what public opinion is and the role it plays in a democracy, we will also look at the ways that journalists and news organizations portray public opinion in the media, the collection of public opinion data by and for the media, and the role that the media play in representing the state of public opinion to their audience members. This will include the linkage between elite and mass opinion, and the influence of public opinion on policy making.

All of this will take place in the context of understanding the quality of the measurement of public opinion and the accuracy of its representation in the media. The focus will be on the use of polls and surveys to measure public opinion, although other techniques will be briefly considered. We will use the case studies of pre-election and exit polls to consider how information about public opinion is collected and disseminated and what the impact of alternative representations in news stories might be.

There is a CTools site for the class, and most of the required reading will be available there. The readings include several review essays that appear as chapters in Wolfgang Donsbach and Michael W. Traugott (editors), **The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research** (Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA 2008). They are identified below with the reference "Sage Handbook." Beyond the readings, you should be attentive to four websites that track current public opinion in the United States, if you are not already:

www.fivethirtyeight.com

<http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster>

www.realclearpolitics.com

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/>

<http://www.dailykos.com/blog/elections>

<http://election.princeton.edu/2014/>

We are going to be discussing the campaign and current opinion throughout the semester. That is the main reason I decided to offer the seminar during the fall of a campaign year.

Students will have small projects to undertake during the semester as well as a final term paper. There will be a take home exam at the end of the semester. Final grades will be calculated by combining class participation (15%), work on the small projects (20%), a term paper (30%), and the final exam (35%). We will discuss all of these activities continually during the course of the semester.

September 8: The Theoretical Underpinnings of Public Opinion and Its Role in a Democracy

Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 1 and 2

Lippman, Chapters 1 and 23

Price, Chapters 2 and 3

Price, Chapter 1, "The Public and Public Opinion in Political Theories" (Sage Handbook)

Traugott, Chapter 5

September 15: The Measurement of Public Opinion

AAPOR On-Line Task Force Report

Fishkin, Chapter 8

Lang and Lang, Chapter 4, "Advocacy: Alternative Expressions of Public Opinion" (Sage Handbook)

Morgan and Fellows, Chapter 31, "Focus Groups and Public Opinion" (Sage Handbook)

Price and Neijens, "Opinion Quality in Public Opinion Research," *IJPOR*, 1997

Price and Neijens, "Deliberative Polls: Toward Improved Measures of 'Informed' Public Opinion?" *IJPOR*, 1998

Neijens, Chapter 2, "The Deliberating Public and Deliberative Polls" (Sage Handbook)

Weisberg, Chapter 20, "The Methodological Strengths and Weaknesses of Survey Research" (Sage Handbook)

September 22: Models of Opinion Formation

Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" Reprinted in *Critical Review*, 18: 1, pp. 1-74.

Zaller, **Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion**, Chapters 2, 3, and 5

Visser, Holbrook and Krosnick, Chapter 12, "Knowledge and Attitudes" (Sage Handbook)

Tourangeau and Galesic, Chapter 13, "Theories on the Perception of Social Reality" (Sage Handbook)

Schwarz, Chapter 34, "The Psychology of Survey Response" (Sage Handbook)

September 29: The Impact of the Media on Public Opinion

Arterton, **Media Politics**, Ch. 6

Brettschneider, Chapter 44, "The News Media's Use of Polls" (Sage Handbook)

Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters*, Chapters 3, 5, 7 – 9, Epilogue

Patterson, Chapter 3, "The News as a Reflection of Public Opinion" (Sage Handbook)

Patterson, "U.S. Journalists and Their Use of Election Surveys" (*Public Opinion Quarterly*)

Roessler, Chapter 19, "Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Priming" (Sage Handbook)

Traugott, Chapter 21, "The Uses and Misuses of Polls" (Sage Handbook)

Weaver, Chapter 41, "Attitudes of Journalists toward Public Opinion Research" (Sage Handbook)

October 6: The Design of Pre-election and Exit Polls

Freedman and Goldstein, 1996, "Building a Probable Electorate From Preelection Polls: A Two-Stage Approach," *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Gelman and King, 1993, *British Journal of Political Science*

Traugott and Tucker, 1984, *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Traugott and Wlezien, 2009, *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Traugott, 2011, Chapter 20 (Oxford Handbook)

Traugott, 2012, Chapter 4, Methodological Trends and Controversies in the Media's Use of Polls"

Mitofsky, *A Short History of Exit Polls*

ABC News Report on the 2000 Exit Polls

CBS News Report on the 2000 Exit Polls

CNN Report on the 2000 Exit Polls

Readings on the Revisions to the exit poll Strategy for the 2012 Elections

October 13: NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

October 20: The Accuracy of Pre-election Polls

AAPOR Report on 2008 Pre-Primary Polls

Gallup 2012 Presidential Election Polling Review

McClain and Spiegelman, "Understanding Measurement Error in Vote Recall and Vote Intention: Question Wording Experiments in 2013 Virginia and New Jersey Gubernatorial Polling"

Astudillo et al., "Which Likely Voter Model Is Best? Relative Accuracy of Likely Voter Models in the 2013 Virginia and New Jersey Governor's Elections"

McClain, Wilke, and Kafka, "Mode Comparisons in Pre-election Polling"

October 27: Issues in the Reporting of Polls in the Media

Donsbach and Hartung, Chapter 39, "The Legal Status of Public Opinion Research in the World" (Sage Handbook)

Frankovic, "Opinion Polls and the Media in the United States"

Stromback, "Published Opinion Polls, Strategic Party Behavior, and News Management"

Traugott and Means, "Problems of Character: Was It the Candidate or the Press?"

Traugott and Powers, "Did Public Opinion Support the Contract with America?"

Traugott- Shorenstein Essay, 2009, "Changes in Media Polling in recent Presidential Campaigns: Moving from Good to 'Average' at CNN"

WAPOR, "Who Is Afraid of Opinion Polls?"

November 3: Do We Have a Knowledgeable Public?

Delli Carpini and Keeter, Chapters 2 - 4

Dran and Hildreth, 1995, "What the Public Thinks about How We Know What It Is Thinking" *IJPOR*

Hildreth, Chapter 40, "Attitudes of the Public Toward Public Opinion Research and Polling" (Sage Handbook)

Kepplinger, Chapter 18, "Effects of the News Media on Public Opinion" (Sage Handbook)

Traugott and Kang, Ch. 8, "Public Attention to Polls"

November 10: The Polling Industry and the Need for Transparency

AAPOR Report on the 2008 Pre-Primary Polls

Mosteller Ch. 5, "Measuring the Error"

Crespi, Chs. 2, 3, and 9

Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy, 2005, "A Review and Proposal for a New Measure of Polling Accuracy", *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Mitofsky, 1996, "Was 1996 a Worse Year for the Polls than 1948?"

Traugott, 2012, "Data Quality from Low Cost Data Collection Methodologies"

Falsified Data: Strategic Vision and Daily Kos and PPP (articles from Pollster.com and Fivethirtyeight.com)

November 17: Public Opinion about Racial Issues

Brader, Valentino, and Suhay, 2008, "What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and ImmigrationThreat" *American Journal of Political Science*.

Dixon, 2008, "Network News and Racial Beliefs: Exploring the Connection Between National Television News Exposure and Stereotypical Perceptions of African Americans" *Journal of Communication*

Gilens, 1996, "'Race Coding' and White Opposition to Welfare" *American Political Science Review*

Kinder and Winter, 2001, "Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy" *American Journal of Political Science*

November 24: Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs

Berinsky, 2007, "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict" *Journal of Politics*

Berinsky and Druckman, 2007, "Public Opinion and Support for the Iraq War" *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver, 2007, "Iraq the Vote: Retrospective and Prospective Foreign Policy Judgments on Candidate Choice and Casualty Tolerance" *Political Behavior*

Groeling and Baum, 2008, "Crossing the Water's Edge: Elite Rhetoric, Media Coverage, and the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon" *Journal of Politics*

Traugott and Brader, "Framing Terrorism"

Zaller, "Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis"

December 1: Public Opinion and Public Policy

Blidook, 2008, "Media, Public Opinion and Health Care in Canada: How the Media Affect 'The Way Things Are'" *Canadian Journal of Political Science*

Dearing, 1989, "Setting the Polling Agenda for AIDS" *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Denham, 2004, "*Sports Illustrated*, the mainstream press and the enactment of drug policy in Major League Baseball: A study in agenda-building theory" *Journalism*

Spence, 2010, "Episodic Frames and HIV/AIDS: The Media and African American Public Opinion" *Political Research Quarterly*

Nisbet and Lowenstein, "Biotechnology and the American Media : The Policy Process and the Elite Press, 1970 to 1999" *Science Communication*

Winter, 2005, "Framing Gender: Political Rhetoric, Gender Schemas, and Public Opinion on U.S. Health Care Reform" *Politics and Gender*

December 8: Student Presentations

December 17: Take home exam