

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Essential Questions:

- Why is public opinion important in the political process?
- Which social factors influence our own political socialization the most?
- How can we judge whether a poll is accurate and trustworthy?



Do you support the war in Iraq?



Warm Up/Do Now: Poll your classmates!—5-8 minutes:

- 1) First, create a question or statement which you could use to gain the students' opinion on a hot political issue such as the war in Iraq, the war on terror, national security, predictions for the 2008 Presidential election, or any other issues we have discussed in class this year. Your question should also include three categories of responses, such as "agree, disagree, and unsure." 1-2 minutes.
- 2) Wait for me to give the green light on this next task: Using your question, poll all of the students in the classroom. Avoid extra side conversations and stay on task. To ensure better accuracy, make sure to keep track of who you interviewed. Record these results and compute the percentages! 4-5 minutes.
- 3) Reflect on your results. Do you think your results represent an accurate measure of the whole student body's opinion on the issue you chose? Why or why not? 1-2 minutes.

What is Public Opinion?

- **Public opinion** is 'what the people think about issues, candidates, or political parties at any given point in time.'
- Opinions are normally measured by opinion polls.
- Candidates and current office holders seek to turn public opinion into policy.

Opinion Polls

Polls are interviews or surveys of a sample of citizens used to estimate how the public feels about an issue or set of issues.



POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

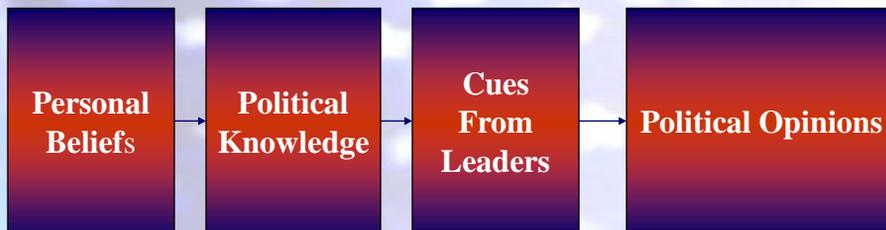
- We get our political opinions through **political socialization**— the process by which we develop our political attitudes, values, and beliefs.



Political Socialization and Other Factors That Influence Opinion Formation

- Political attitudes are grounded in values. We learn our values by a process known as political socialization.
- **Many factors influence opinion formation.**
 - **The Family**
 - **The Mass Media**
 - **School and Peers**
 - **The Impact of Events**
 - **Social/economic groups**
 - **Religion, Race,**
 - **Education, Income,**
 - **Gender, Region**

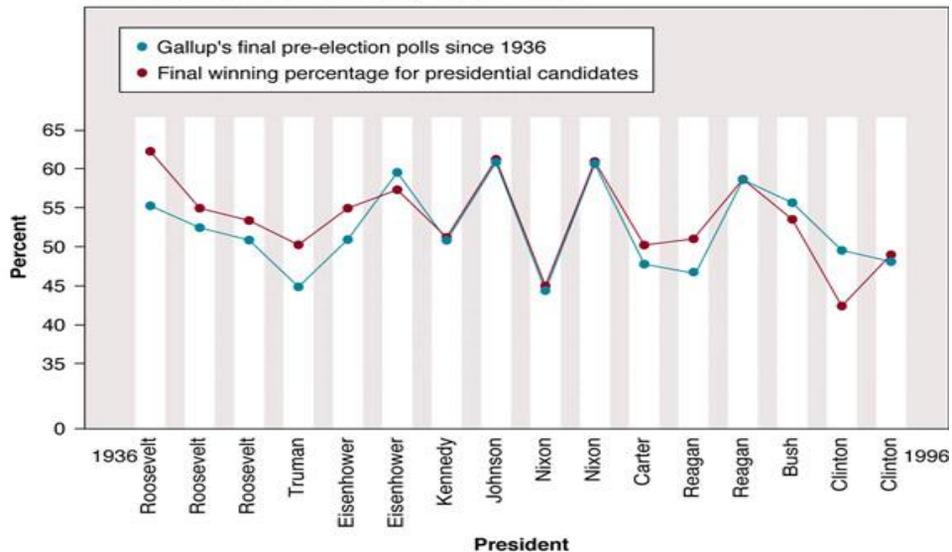
How We Form Political Opinions



Qualities of Public Opinion

- **Intensity** - the strength of a position for or against a public policy or an issue
- **Fluidity** - the extent to which public opinion changes over time
- **Stability** - the extent to which public opinion remains constant over a period of time
- **Relevance** - the extent to which an issue is of concern at a particular time
- **Political Knowledge**

Figure 11.1 The Success of the Gallup Poll □
in Presidential Elections, 1936-1996



Gallup's average error: 1936–48, 4.3% 1952–63, 2.0% 1972–88, 1.6% 1992, 6.0% 1996, 1.0%

SOURCE: Marty Baumann, "How One Polling Firm Stacks Up," *USA Today* (October 27, 1992): 13A. 1996 data from Mike Mokrzycki, "Pre-election Polls' Accuracy Varied," *The Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution* (November 8, 1996): A12.

Types of Polls

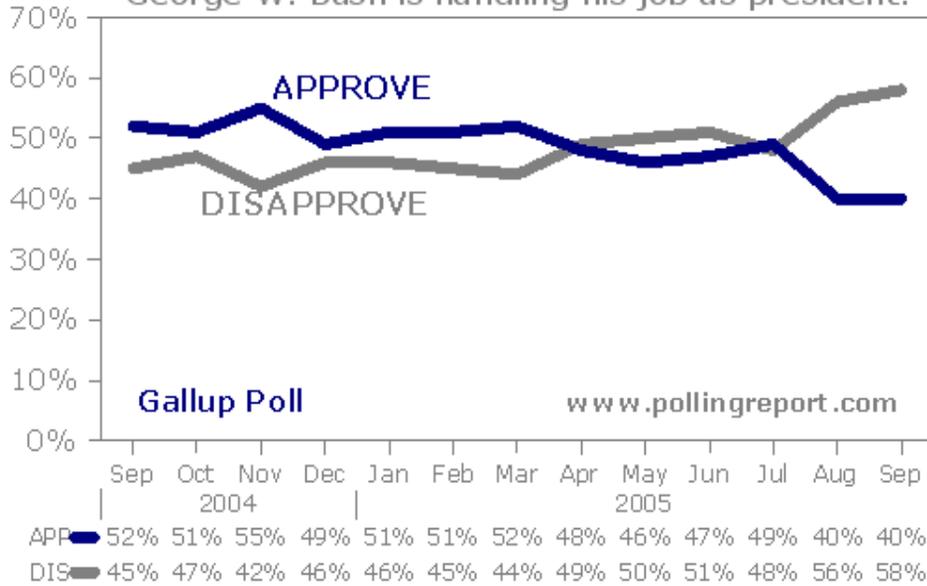


- **Tracking polls**--continuous surveys that enable a campaign to chart its daily rise and fall in popularity. These may be a decent measure of trends.
- **Exit polls**--polls conducted at polling places on election day.
- **Deliberative polls**—attempts to measure what the public would think if they had better opportunities to thoughtfully consider the issues first.
 - A relatively large scientific sample of Americans (600) were selected for intensive briefings, discussions, and presentations about issue clusters including foreign affairs, the family, and the economy.

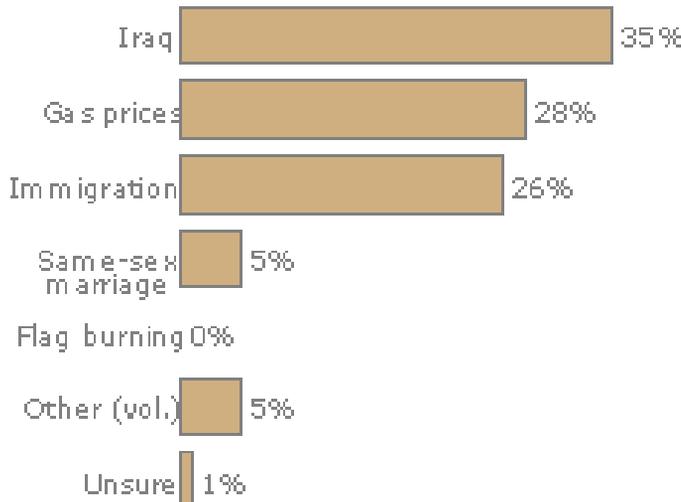


PRESIDENT BUSH

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?"



FOX NEWS/OPINION DYNAMICS POLL
"Which one of the following issues do you think should be the top priority for Congress to work on this summer [see below]?"

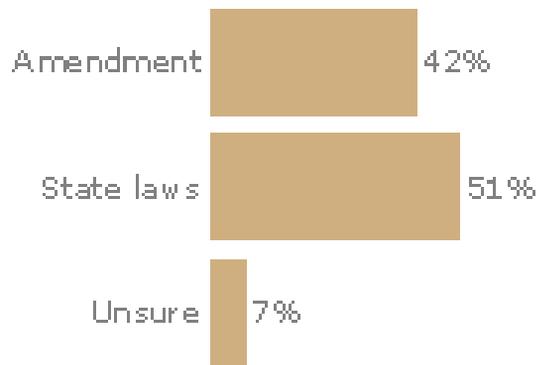


www.pollingreport.com

Are public opinion polls shaping the current administration's policies?



ABC NEWS POLL
 "Would you support amending the U.S. Constitution to make it against the law for homosexual couples to get married anywhere in the U.S., or should each state make its own laws on homosexual marriage?"



www.pollingreport.com

According to this poll, do more Americans believe that gay marriage is a state or national issue? Why?



Mark Richards, PhotoEdit, Laura Kleinhenz, Corbis/Bettmann

Political Polling Polls help candidates find out how well their campaigns are doing.
Summarize How can inaccurate polls have a negative effect on the political process?

How We Measure Public Opinion

- In general, do not trust a poll that does not tell you the question wording, the sampling method, and the ways in which respondents were contacted.
- Reputable pollsters will also tell you the number of respondents (the 'n') and the error rate (+ or - 5%).
- Any poll that tells you to call 555-5554 for yes and 555-5555 for no is unscientific and unreliable. This is not a random sample at all!

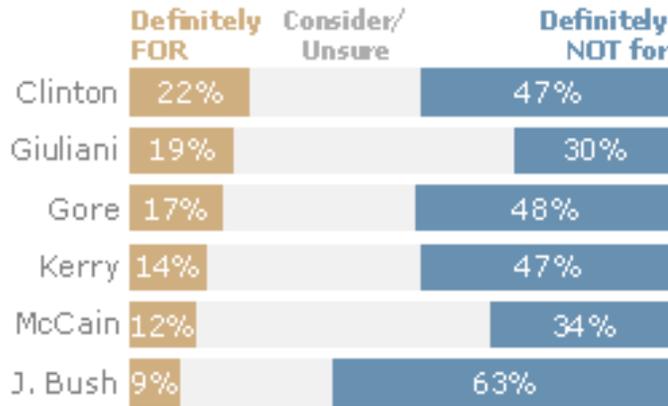
How do politicians measure public opinion?

In order for a poll to be reliable, it must have:

- **Proper question wording**
- **An accurate sample: random selection, LARGE sample size**

CNN POLL

"I'm going to ask you about some people who may run for president in 2008. For each one, please tell me whether you would definitely vote for that person, whether you might consider voting for that person, or whether you would definitely not vote for that person. . . ."



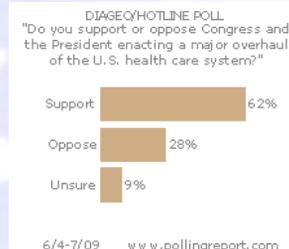
www.pollingreport.com

- What factors influence the reliability of this data?



Assignment: Evaluate Public Opinion Polls

- Go to <http://www.pollingreport.com/>
- Find (3) three polls which interest you.
- Then, answer the following questions for each poll:
 - 1) Who sponsored the poll?
 - 2) Who did the polling?
 - 3) Who was interviewed? How many?
 - 4) What questions were asked?
 - 5) How/when were the interviews conducted?
 - 6) Are all the results based on the entire sample?
 - 7) In your opinion, does this poll accurately represent American public opinion. Why or why not?



Socratic Seminar on “What Democracy Means to Ninth Graders.”

REQUIRED READINGS: CHAPTER 5 & 6

Seminar Questions:

- 1. What is the thesis of the article?
- 2. Can poll results accurately measure students’ views of democracy and civic education? How large were the population samples?
- 3. Are the authors’ arguments and evidence convincing? Are the poll results used properly?

Project: Conduct your Own Political Poll!

- **Introduction:** In our next unit on campaigns and elections, you will divide into groups and run your own mock presidential campaigns! Accordingly, this project on political polls will allow you to gather preliminary data on the issues which are most impacting the presidential campaigns.
- **Directions:** Working with a partner, you will create a 10-question political poll on the domestic and international issues which most impact presidential campaigns. Your challenge is to determine what these issues are and to develop concise, unbiased questions which will produce accurate results. Issue topics can include, but are not limited to: the economy, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and abortion. Each question should focus on a different issue. In addition, here’s some rules to follow when creating and conducting your poll:
 - **Proper question wording**—easy “yes” or “no” and “agree” or “disagree” responses
 - **Random selection of participants to take the poll**
 - **A good sample size**—at least 25 individuals? Or more?
- **Assessment:** You must compute the results of the surveys as percentages and then represent the percentages in pie graphs! This is easy to do on Excel, or you can draw your own. Then, you will write a 200-word essay, describing how a political campaign might be able to use these results to create a winning platform in the presidential elections. In addition, you must comment on the “pitfalls” (potential inaccuracies) of polls and why a campaign must be cautious in totally relying on them.