

Political Science 541
Topics in Public Affairs: Survey Research and Polling within the Policy Process
Spring 2010

Professor: Leonie Huddy
Class Time: Wed 2:00 – 5:00
Class Location: SBS N-705
Office Hours: W 12:00-1:00, 5:00-6:00 or by appointment (632-7639), SBS S-727
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Course Outline: This course covers the use of surveys within public policy research. Surveys are used increasingly within the policy process to gauge policy needs, evaluate policy implementation, market new policies, interview policy makers, and assess the internal workings of policy-linked organizations. While surveys makes it easier to talk with some credibility about what most people want, believe, value and so on, it can also lead to abuses, and the possible misrepresentation of public opinion. Obviously, the accuracy of survey findings is undermined by a poorly drawn sample, or ambiguously worded questions. Thus, the main objective of this course is to improve understanding of the strengths and limitations of the survey. This is done in two ways: (1) through class readings discussions, and examples of relevant surveys and survey research, and (2) by conducting a class survey on a relevant policy issue.

Lectures and readings begin with a brief historical overview of the survey with a special emphasis on its use within the policy making, implementation, and evaluation process. This is followed by detailed reading and lectures on how survey research is conducted. Topics covered include sampling theory and the importance of random sampling, how to write successful survey questions, how to structure a questionnaire to avoid common pitfalls caused by question order, the importance of interviews and interviewer training, and the analysis and interpretation of survey findings. Throughout the semester, we will read research findings on each topic and work in parallel to readings by developing, implementing and analyzing the findings of our class survey. Students will be assigned specific tasks in relation to the survey and it is essential to attend all class and keep up with all assignments throughout the semester.

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students requiring emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information: <http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/fire/disabilities.asp>

Assessment: There will be several different forms of course assessment: 3 short assignments worth 10% each, two tests worth 15% each, and a research paper presenting the findings from the class survey (roughly 10 pages) worth 25%. The remaining 15% of the class grade will be based on class attendance, completion of roughly 20-30 interviews (this is part of the class survey project and will be explained in class), and participation in both class discussions and

group work assignments. The final research paper will underscore the practical implications of class survey findings, particularly their strengths and limitations.

Blackboard: Students are required to check Blackboard before each class for course information. The syllabus, class assignments, and copies of required articles and book chapters will also be posted on the site. Blackboard can be accessed at the following site:
<http://blackboard.sunysb.edu>

Readings: There are three required texts that are available for purchase from the book store. The books are also available at various on-line stores. Readings for each topic covered in the course include a selection of chapters from these three books. There are additional readings (marked with an asterisk) that will be posted on Blackboard. The following texts are required class readings:

Erikson, Robert and Tedin, Kent. 2007. *American Public Opinion*. New York, N.Y.: Pearson/Longman. ISBN: 0321430190 (pbk.)

Weisberg, H. F., Krosnick, J. A., & Bowen, B. D. 1996. *An introduction to survey research and data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 0803974027

Pyrzczak, Fred and Randall R. Bruce. 2007. *Writing Empirical Research Reports: A Basic Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Pyrczak Publishing. ISBN 1884585752.

1/27 **I. Course Overview/ Organization and Introduction.** An overview of the uses of surveys and polls in the political process and examples of common kinds of survey questions. Discussion of course requirements. Possible topics for class survey.

2/3 **II. An Overview of Public Opinion Research.**
 A brief history of public opinion polling. Some common aspects of public opinion, its limits and uses. Some of the basics concerning polling and methods.

Weisberg et. al., Ch. 1.

Erikson & Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*. Chapter 1, Public Opinion in Democratic Societies; Chapter 2, The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion; Chapter 3 Micro-Level Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion Holding.

* Carroll J. Glynn, Susan Herbst, Robert Shapiro, and Garrett O'Keefe. 1999, *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. [Chapter 3. Methods for Studying

Public Opinion.]

2/10

III. Use of Surveys Within the Policy Process. A Focus on Long Island

Common uses of surveys within the policy making process; some examples of the ways in which surveys can inform the policy process. The policy-survey process. The role of non-profits, government and the media. A focus on the Rauch foundation, the Long Island Index, and their series of reports on the cost of living on Long Island, housing, and the growing pains of one of the oldest suburban communities in the country.

Erikson & Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*. Chapter 4, Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Public Sentiment; Chapter 10 The Public and Its Elected Representatives.

Center for Survey Research: The Long Island Index

[ALL REPORTS AND SURVEYS WILL BE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD]

*Long Island Index: 2007 “A Tale of Two Suburbs: Survey Report on Jobs, taxes, and Government on Long Island and in Northern Virginia.”

*Long Island Index: 2009 “EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY ON LONG ISLAND: PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS”

2/17

IV. Obtaining a Sample. Different kinds of samples with a focus on telephone and web; problems with increasing reliance on cell phones; when to use a random sample; ways of collecting sample.

Weisberg et. al., Ch. 3.

*Lavrakas, 1993. *Telephone Survey Methods*. Chapters 2 and 3

* Keeter, Scott, Kennedy, Courtney, Clark, April, Thomson, Trevor, Mike Mokrzycki. 2007. “What’s Missing from National RDD Landline Surveys? The Impact of the Growing Cell-Only Population.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 71(5), 772-792.

ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE TODAY (samples).

2/24

V. Writing a Questionnaire. Part I. Focus groups and open-ended responses; factual questions and memory. Using focus groups to develop survey questions and learn more about a survey topic, the use of cognitive interviews to pre-test survey questions, different types of pre-tests, using open-ended questions in a

structured interview. The role of memory in answering autobiographical questions. Validation of factual responses.

Qualitative Approaches

*Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Bruce Williams. 1994. The Method is the Message: Focus Groups as a Method of Social, Psychological, and Political Inquiry. In Delli-Carpini, Michael X., Leonie Huddy, and Robert Y. Shapiro 1994 (eds.), *Research in Micropolitics: New Directions in Political Psychology*, Volume 4. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. Pp. 57-85.

*Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz. Chapter 2. *Thinking about Answers: The Application of Cognitive Processes to Survey Methodology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 0787901202. Chapter 2 (Methods for Determining Cognitive Processes and Questionnaire Problems).

Factual Questions & Memory

*Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz.. *Thinking about Answers: The Application of Cognitive Processes to Survey Methodology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 0787901202. Chapter 9 (Counting and Estimation).

*Belli, Robert F., Michael W. Traugott, Margaret Young, Katharine A. McGonagle. 1999. Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys: Social Desirability, Memory Failure, and Source Monitoring. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63 (1) 90-108.

3/3

VI. Writing a Questionnaire: Part II. Attitudes: The process of answering a survey question, survey response effects, question order effects. Survey response options. Background factors that influence political attitudes for inclusion in surveys.

Weisberg, Chapter 4, 7

Erikson & Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*. Chapter 6, Public Opinion and democratic Stability; Chapter 7, Group Differences in Political Opinions.

*Converse, J. M. & Presser, S. (1986). *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. ISBN: 0803927436 (pages 31-47).

3/10

VII. Writing a Questionnaire: Part III. Readings on Specific Topic of Class Survey. These readings will be announced once we have settled on a class survey topic.

ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE TODAY (QUESTIONS ON CLASS SURVEY TOPIC)

TBA

- 3/17** **VIII. First Test and Review of Class Survey.** Half of this sessions will be devoted to the first test, and the second half will focus on the final class survey.
- 3/24** **IX. Web and Mail Surveys:** Sampling, design, administration.
 *Dillman, Don A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. New York; John Wiley. (2nd edition). Chapters 3 (Constructing the Questionnaire Pp. 79-148).

 *Scott Fricker, Mirta Galesic, Roger Tourangeau, and Ting Yan. 2005. An Experimental Comparison of Web and Telephone Surveys. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69: 370 - 392.

 *Neil Malhotra and Jon A. Krosnick. 2007. The Effect of Survey Mode and Sampling on Inferences about Political Attitudes and Behavior: Comparing the 2000 and 2004 ANES to Internet Surveys with Nonprobability Samples. *Political Analysis* 2007 15: 286-323
- 3/31** **SPRING BREAK**
- 4/7** **X. Problems of Non-Response.** Nature of Threat Posed by Individual Non-Response. The most common reasons for non-participation; the implications of this for sample integrity. Possible solutions, including the use of post-stratification weights.
ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE TODAY (ACCOUNT OF YOUR EXPERIENCES COMPLETING WEB SURVEYS ON LINE).

 * Floyd J. Fowler. 2002. Survey Research Methods (Applied Social Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: sage. [Chapter 3, Nonresponse: Implementing a Sample Design.]

 *Keeter, Scott, Carolyn Miller, Andrew Kohut, Robert M. Groves, and Stanley Presser. (2000). "Consequences of Reducing Nonresponse in a National Telephone Survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64: 125-148.

 *Keeter, Scott, Courtney Kennedy, Michale Dimock, Jonathon Best, Peyton Craighill. 2006. Gauging the Impact of Growing Nonresponse on Estimates from a national RDD Telephone Survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70(5), 759-779.

4/14 **XI. The Interview as a Social Situation.** Social desirability, race-of-interviewer effects, interviewing medium, the interview as a dyadic interaction; interviewer training; begin interviewing.

Weisberg et. al., Ch. 5

*Tourangeau, Roger, Lance Rips and Kenneth Rasinski. 2000. *The Psychology of Survey Response*. Chapter 9 (Editing of Responses).

*Douglas B. Currivan; Amy L. Nyman; Charles F. Turner; Lois Biener. 2004. "Does telephone audio computer-assisted self-interviewing improve the accuracy of prevalence estimates of youth smoking? Evidence from the UMass tobacco study." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Winter 2004 v68 i4 p542(23)

*Maria A. Villarroel, Charles F. Turner, Elizabeth Eggleston, Alia Al-Tayyib, Susan M. Rogers, Anthony M. Roman, Philip C. Cooley, and Harper Gordek. 2006. Same-Gender Sex in the United States: Impact of T-Acasi on Prevalence Estimates. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2006; 70 (2): 166 - 196.

4/21 **ALL SURVEYS MUST BE COMPLETED AND BROUGHT TO CLASS**

4/21 **XII. The Logic of Research & Data Entry:** Hypothesis testing, refresher in basic statistics. Working with data in the lab. [Computer Science SINC site, room 2116]

Weisberg, Chapter 6, 8, 9, 10

Pyrzack and Randall, Chapters 1-3.

4/28 **SECOND TEST**

4/28 **XIII. Second Test and Data Entry, Cleaning, Analysis, Statistics and Report writing: I.** [Computer Science SINC site, room 2116]. Half of this sessions will be devoted to the second test. The rest of the sessions will focus on handling data, scale construction, hypothesis testing, basic overview of SPSS, basic statistics, discuss findings, report writing.

Weisberg et. al. Chs. 11-13, 16

Pyrzack and Randall, Chapters 4, 6

5/5 **XIV. Data Entry, Cleaning, Analysis, Statistics and Report writing: II.** [Computer Science SINC site, room 2116]

Weisberg et. al. Chs. 14-15

Pyrczak and Randall, Chapters 9,10, 11

5/12

FINAL PAPER DUE