The Enduring Democracy

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Third Edition

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Take The Tour
Click the app buttons above to access the additional pedagogical tools and supplements that accompany the text.

THE BRIEF TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Click on the HOME button to return to the main screen
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Succinctly written Learning Objectives have been added to the beginning of each chapter. These objectives are interspersed throughout the text and tied together in the end of the chapter through a summary and review test questions. Web Quizzes tied to those objectives will also be available online for student use.

CHAPTER 10
PUBLIC OPINION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

PUBLIC OPINION IN AMERICAN POLITICS
- Appreciate the centrality of public opinion to American democratic process and the critical function public opinion plays in the policy-making process

HOW IS PUBLIC OPINION EXPRESSED?
- Compare and contrast the different ways in which public opinion may be expressed, including public opinion polls, editorials, and political advertising

THE LEVELS OF PUBLIC OPINION
- Distinguish between the different levels of public opinion: broad-scope, status, and specific

HOW INFORMED IS PUBLIC OPINION?
- Assess the political sophistication of the public and the extent to which public opinion is based on informed, critical understanding of political issues

HOW DOES PUBLIC OPINION FORM?
- Assess the relative importance of experience, education, and interaction with others in shaping public opinion

HOW IS PUBLIC OPINION MEASURED?
- Distinguish between public opinion polls and the alternatives

INTERPRETING PUBLIC OPINION DATA
- Analyze the findings from a poll in terms of the dimensions of dispersion, accuracy, and stability of public opinion

Learning Objectives coincide with the headings in the text. By the end of the chapter, each learning objective is further summarized. Students can test themselves on these objectives.
The visual timelines put these spotlighted events into historical context for students.

**THEN AND NOW**

Each chapter begins with a “Then and now” feature, highlighting how contemporary political events and controversies compare with historical precedents. For example, Chapter 2 shows how challenges to the constitutionality of provisions of the 2010 health care reform legislation are remarkably similar to the challenges lodged against the New Deal laws in the 1930s.

Moreover, we show how the current era of divisiveness in politics is nothing new; nor are the challenges faced by groups, such as gays and lesbians, fighting for their equal rights.
INTERPRETING PUBLIC OPINION DATA

Understanding public opinion requires attention not only to the scientific aspects of sampling and the wording of questions, but also to the analysis and interpretation of the results of a poll. In assessing results, analysts are concerned with three important characteristics of public opinion data: direction, intensity, and continuity. To understand the direction of public opinion, the analyst seeks to find which position or preference a majority of people hold as their opinion. On most topics, there are two possible directions in which public opinion might lean—a positive direction or a negative direction. For example, with respect to presidential approval, respondents might either approve or disapprove of the job the president is doing. Political leaders; or they might support or oppose the war in Iraq in 2007. It is difficult to buy a handbag. On any question, the analyst seeks to gauge.

Intensity is also an important characteristic to note in the direction of opinion. The intensity of a person's opinion is the degree of strength or commitment the public feels about the opinion it holds.

Continuity is the tendency for political preferences to remain generally stable over time.

KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Within each chapter, Key Terms are highlighted in boldface type and defined in the margins of the pages. These key terms are also listed at the end of the chapter, and the terms and definitions are repeated in a glossary at the end of the book.

FIGURE 10.5 Attitudes About TV Tobacco Advertising


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildly agree</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildly disagree</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Opinion in American Politics

The concept of public opinion is central to the American system of government. But the way in which public opinion is gauged and its relevance and uses in the American political system have changed over the nation's history. The U.S. Constitution begins with the words “We the People,” highlighting the notion that the American government is based on the consent of the governed. Nonetheless, there is no mention of democracy literally translated into “the people.” Instead, the Constitution’s framers emphasized the role of “the People” and thus the opinions of the American people in the government. The American system of government is a republic, influenced by Plato and Aristotle in the ancient world, and shaped by the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. The role of public opinion in American democracy is a key element in our democratic form of government.

From the time of the Founding Fathers and throughout American history, political leaders have recognized the importance of public opinion. The “public voice” and the “public interest” have been at the heart of American democracy. Public opinion is actively encouraged and empowered to influence government, because the purpose of governing is to serve the public interest. Political leaders recognize that the collective will of the people is best expressed through the process of public opinion. The role of public opinion in American democracy is a key element in our democratic form of government. Public opinion can emerge as a key factor in any political context, and that public opinion often is responsible for determining the outcome of important political battles. Long before Schattschneider, President Abraham Lincoln expressed this idea based on his own experiences, saying: “Public sentiment is everything. Without public sentiment nothing can fail; with it nothing can succeed.”

Though most scholars, elected leaders, and the public agree that public opinion is and should be very important, there is no consensus on how to define, measure, or predict public opinion. The Gallup Poll has correctly predicted the winner of every presidential election contest since its first projection in 1936 that Franklin D. Roosevelt would defeat Alf Landon. However, public opinion is complex and difficult to measure. It is not always accurate, and it can change rapidly. Public opinion can be influenced by a variety of factors, including media, social media, and other sources of information. Public opinion is not always reliable, and it can be manipulated by individuals or groups with their own agendas. Despite these challenges, public opinion remains an important and often controversial aspect of American politics.
CHECK THE LIST

Items That Should be Disclosed About Any Publicly Released Poll

Many polls conducted in the United States are intended to provide information for public consumption. These polls are referred to as “public polls.” The USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll, the New York Times/CBS Poll, and the Harris Interactive Poll are just a few of the organizations that regularly conduct polling intended for public consumption.

There are so many polling organizations, people often have a hard time ascertaining the quality of a poll. The National Council on Public Polls (NCPP) is an association of organizations that regularly conduct public polls. Members of NCPP have articulated the following list of items that should be disclosed about any poll that is released publicly, as a way to help the poll consumer evaluate the quality of the poll:

✔️ The name of the organization that sponsored or paid for the poll
✔️ The dates of interviewing
✔️ The method for obtaining the interviews (for example, telephone, e-mail, in-person)
✔️ A definition of the population that was sampled
✔️ The size of the sample (that is, the number of interviews conducted)
✔️ The size and description of subsamples, if the poll relies primarily on less than the total sample
✔️ The complete wording of questions on which the poll results are based
✔️ The percentages from the poll on which conclusions are based

POINT TO PONDER: Do these questions address the average citizen’s concerns about the use of polls in modern election campaigning? Is there more that you would need to know to judge the validity of polls, and if so, what?

Sources: A list articulated by members of the National Council on Public Polls.

CHECK THE LIST

In each chapter of the text, the “Check the List” feature presents a list (sometimes a ranked list) of people, places, events, issues and so on that address some aspect of American politics.

Each list is followed up by critical thinking questions or “Points to Ponder.”
FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Each Chapter also includes a feature named “From Your Perspective,” which considers contemporary political issues from the unique perspective of college students, tapping into the experiences they bring to bear when studying American government. Critical Thinking Questions that follow each From Your Perspective box, allow for further in-class discussion.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

College Students Making Their Voices Heard in Occupy Wall Street

The economic recession of 2007–2010 slammed virtually all sectors of the American economy. College students seeking part-time summer jobs to help support their education and new college graduates seeking to enter the world of work were perhaps hit the hardest. Thus, many students were drawn to the Occupy Wall Street movement, which sought to focus public attention on the growing trend of income inequality and the excesses of Wall Street. On October 14, 2011, rallies were held on 100 campuses across the nation to show college student unity with the broader Occupy Wall Street movement that was sweeping the nation. Demonstrators on and off campuses voiced their concerns with lack of jobs, the high cost of college tuition, and the mounting debt from student loans.

For Critical Thinking and Discussion

1. Have you ever participated in a protest rally or march on campus? If so, what spurred you to do so? If not, what would it take to incite you to join such a protest?

2. Marches and protests are more common expressions of public opinion among college and university students than they tend to be among other groups of like-minded citizens. How, if at all, do you think colleges and universities tend to foster this form of expression in particular?
The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Each chapter features a box entitled “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Here, the premise that American political history has a habit of repeating itself receives ample attention—it is thus no wonder that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Certainly the specific names and details change, but most contemporary problems and controversies have been identified, tackled, and in some cases outright resolved over and over at different points in the past.

Polling Problems in Presidential Elections

“Dewey Defeats Truman”? “Gore Defeats Bush”? Not so, as it turned out. Still, that didn’t stop public opinion polls from convincing many in the media that Thomas Dewey would be elected president in 1948, and that Al Gore would be the winner in 2000. More than 50 years apart, the polls played an important role in two predictions that caused considerable confusion. Then, in 2008, the pollsters struck again.

In 1948, polls leading up to Election Day predicted that New York Governor Thomas Dewey would soundly defeat President Harry S. Truman. The Gallup Poll, the Roper Poll, and other opinion polling organizations consistently found Dewey ahead throughout much of the fall campaign. The scientific sampling methods they employed had been used by these same organizations in successfully calling the winner of every presidential race since 1936. The problem? All the major pollsters stopped their pre-election polling at least two weeks before Election Day, in fact, Dewey did maintain a large lead throughout the campaign, a lead that had not changed up through mid-October. So the pollsters just stopped polling. Then, in the final weeks of the campaign, Truman’s fulminating and aggressive campaign schedule began to make a difference, and voter opinions began to shift in favor of the incumbent president. Yet, the pollsters didn’t pick up these changes. Thus their confident prediction that Dewey would win proved wrong, and the Chicago Tribune became famous for running the paper with its premature headline: “Dewey Defeats Truman.”

In 2000, the presidential election between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore proved once again the pollsters could be fallible. In the last few weeks of the campaign, many respected polling organizations showed a tight race between the two candidates. The Voter News Service (VNS), a company that conducted polls of voters immediately after they exited voting booths (apply termed “exit polls”), was supported in 2000 by ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, and the Associated Press. On Election Day that year, VNS conducted exit polls in each of the 50 states as a way of predicting the winner in each state, thus facilitating an accurate prediction of the electoral college outcome. For each of the 60 states in the previous seven presidential elections, network exit-polling correctly predicted the presidential winners. When the polls in Florida closed at 8 PM, VNS began tabulating its results, including its results in Florida, and sent the results to the media organizations that supported VNS. Based on the Florida exit-poll data, the networks declared Gore the winner in Florida, which gave him enough electoral college votes to win the election. Unfortunately, Florida was no story, and ballooning was so complicated in that state, that the exit-poll call was problematic. The flawed exit-poll prediction complicated an already confusing election night for the television networks. It would take more than five weeks after Election Day and a U.S. Supreme Court decision to declare George W. Bush the winner in Florida, and thus the winner of the presidential election.

In 2008, pre-election pollsters struggled to accurately project the outcome of several Democratic Party primaries. Most notable were the polls associated with the New Hampshire primary. USA Today/Gallup, CBS, and AP exits polls each predicted Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton would win the New Hampshire primary, eventually leading to an upset loss by Barack Obama. Meanwhile, the New York Times, CNN polls, and Inside Politics polls each predicted Obama would win the New Hampshire primary, eventually leading to an upset win by Hillary Clinton.

Critical Thinking Questions aid students in understanding the material.

1. Polls, for the most part, have been quite successful in predicting the outcome of elections, despite the status post facto. Do you think that these highly visible, though infrequent, instances of incorrect poll projections should make journalists more cautious in relying on polls to report on any particular race?

2. The publication of poll results in the days before an election is often criticized because some say that voters are influenced to vote for the “leader” in a poll—the so-called bandwagon effect. Do you think that there is any merit to this criticism?

Timelines break up the margins nicely.
END OF CHAPTER MATERIAL

The end of chapter materials break the text up according to the major heads in the chapter. Bullet points summarize the learning objectives while the Test Yourself questions help students apply those objectives.

Test Yourself on This Section

1. Which of the following books and scientific surveys to document the low level of political knowledge among ordinary American citizens?
   a. Federalist Papers
   b. The American Value
   c. The Decline of America
   d. Why Whiting on America

2. Despite low levels of political knowledge among Americans, V.O. Key argued that "voters are not fools." How does he justify this claim?

How Does Public Opinion Form?

- Individual opinions are shaped by political socialization; impressions formed during youth often last well into adulthood. Opinions are also shaped by demographics (race, ethnic groups, age, etc.) family influence, peers, and religious organizations.

Test Yourself on This Section

1. The primary tendency has greatest impact through which of the following agents of political socialization?
   a. family
   b. friends
   c. the media

2. How does entertainment television programming act as a factor that influences one's socialization to politics?

How Is Public Opinion Measured?

- Public opinion polls measure the opinions of a large group of people by selecting a subset of the larger group and then generalizing the findings from the small group back to the larger group. To ensure that the poll is scientific, the sample must be chosen randomly using probability theory through techniques such as random digit dialing. Unscientific polls can produce misleading results.

The way in which questions on a poll are worded is also an important factor in assessing the quality of a poll. Misleading

The Test Yourself segments incorporate both multiple choice questions and short answer questions.

1. What distinguishes a scientific poll from an unscientific one?

Interpreting Public Opinion Data

- The proper interpretation of public opinion data requires attention to the directions, intensity, and continuity of the public's expressions. With regard to the third characteristic, political preferences may fluctuate wildly over short periods of time.

2. V.O. Key argued that "public opinion" is not merely the summation of individual opinions. What else, according to Key, was necessary for "public opinion" to be present?

How Is Public Opinion Expressed?

- Public opinion may be expressed through a variety of means, including public opinion polls, voting, free speech and assembly, political participation, the support of particular candidates for political offices, and the contribution of time and effort to interest groups.

- The news media also serve as an outlet for public opinion, whether by publishing articles about important individual opinions or by sponsoring their own public opinion polls on social and policy issues. Will many members of the public prefer to express their opinions directly to elected officials through letters, phone calls, or e-mails. Blogs have become an increasingly popular way for individuals to express their views on issues.

Test Yourself on This Section

1. The legal guarantees protecting press freedom as a form of public opinion may be found in the
   a. Declaration of Independence
   b. First Amendment
   c. Second Amendment
   d. Fourth Amendment

2. Elections are an expression of public opinion. When the Constitution was first adopted, which of the following provided a direct link between popular preferences and federal office holders?
   a. presidential elections
   b. Senate elections
   c. House elections
   d. elections of Supreme Court justices

3. Identify five specific ways that public opinion may be expressed in the American political system.

The Levels of Public Opinion

- Public opinion exists at its most abstract level in the form of values and beliefs. It exists in more specific forms through political orientations, which translate values and beliefs into a systematic way of assessing political reality, and in an even more specific way in the form of particular political preferences.

Test Yourself on This Section

1. Over the past 50 years, which of the following partisan groups has increased proportionately?
   a. Democrats
   b. Independents
   c. Republicans
   d. Socialists

2. The broadest and most abstract level of public opinion that forms the basis for American political cultures is a. values and beliefs
b. preferences on policy issues
c. political orientations
   d. preferences for political candidates

3. Distinguish between the "liberal" and "conservative" ideologies in contemporary politics.

How Informed Is Public Opinion?

- Many noted scholars in the early and mid-twentieth-century argued that there is the necessary knowledge for their opinions to be studied. Contemporary surveys continue to confirm that the public maintains a low interest in politics generally, and that most Americans are unfamiliar with basic political facts.

By contrast, numerous other scholars, beginning with V.O. Key in the 1960s, have argued that regardless of their specific knowledge of politics, the public as a whole exhibits a relatively consistent, understanding of politics that is conveyed in logical and meaningful directions based on their values and beliefs.
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Written by John Clark and Brian Schaffner, this booklet addresses the 2012 congressional and Presidential races, with real-time analysis and references.
CONNECTIONS APP

“The Connections App” is an interactive web app that helps students better understand the relationship between historical and current events and their connection with a basic concept in American government. Connecting students to the concepts, each section includes an author intro of the Then & Now feature, video, timelines and concept questions that get students thinking more critically about politics, then and now.

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