

## CHAPTER 10 READING STUDY GUIDE

**George Gallup** - pioneered methods in gauging public opinion through scientific polling,

- founder of modern-day polling; undoubtedly had a vested interest in fostering reliance on public opinion polls
- Gallup's academic pursuits focused on psychology, which he later expanded to cover public opinion. He developed research methods to assess public opinion and marketed them to newspaper clients
- He was a pollster
- Believed leaders should have an appraisal of public opinion and consider it in reaching their decisions
- Gallup believed that polling helped to "speed up the process of democracy," better ensuring that citizens' views could be taken into account even as they changed

**Walter Lippmann** - instrumental in the growth of public opinion research; credited with spurring the growth of public opinion polling - Lippmann wrote a book in which he observed that research on public opinion was far too limited, especially in light of its importance - Lippmann's critique of public opinion and its role in the democratic process may well have caused the critical assessment of 1936 election polling, however, Lippmann himself is not credited with the discovery of these polling flaws

**1936 Literary Digest poll** that predicted Roosevelt's reelection defeat oversampled the upper middle class and the wealthy - While the poll oversampled telephone owners in general, many of those owners were not middle class voters but rather individuals in a specific voting category that ultimately swayed the poll

**American National Election Studies** - used since 1952 to assess the political attitudes and behavior of the American electorate; evaluates data related exclusively to the United States and political participation by American citizens...compile long-term studies of the electorate - underlying aims center on offering insights into engagement rather than encouraging it

**World Values Survey** - considers information on political attitudes gathered in over 100 countries throughout the world

**Public opinion** can affect **policy** in the United States! ....leaders should have an appraisal of public opinion and consider it in reaching their decisions...The increasing prevalence of polling has allowed for an abundance of data on public opinion that increasingly impacts not only short-term developments like election cycles but regular news coverage and the behavior of policy makers

Decrease in political knowledge will likely cause a decrease in **political participation**! Citizens often apply existing knowledge to political decisions, impacting their ability to engage in the political process in general

The public played a more important role in national and international politics over the last three decades because of the rise in the number of public opinion polls - While Internet technology and the rise of social media has led to substantive changes in the way the public interacts with politics, more structured means of gauging public opinion now impact nearly every decision made by politicians

**Gallup's predictions been the least accurate** - when there is a prominent third-party candidate

**straw polls** - unscientific surveys used to gauge public opinion on a variety of issues

- incorrect results largely because of systemic issues with sampling and timing
- allows for limited sampling among a self-selecting group of people
- known for being unscientific as participants are often self-selecting
- ex: In 1948, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrongly predicted that Republican Thomas E. Dewey would beat incumbent President Harry S. Truman...straw poll led the *Tribune* to make this erroneous prediction
- ex. web polls

## CHAPTER 10 READING STUDY GUIDE

**exit polls** - utilize a scientific system of participant identification and survey timing; exit polls conducted in person..Exit polls are designed to predict election outcomes just after the polls have closed by engaging individuals whom pollsters know with certainty have voted...Exit polls utilize a systematic means to gauge voter behavior

**push polls** - present negative information that might cause voters to vote against a candidate, seek to encourage specific voter behavior; they do not necessarily favor an election's frontrunner...Those responsible for taking push polls do not record the results since push polls are designed to dissuade voters from considering a particular candidate

- ex. Would you approve or disapprove of the job that Rosemary Austin is doing if you knew that she never even reads the legislation before voting to spend your tax dollars?

**tracking polls** - follow trends over time using a scientific methodology; identify information that can ultimately offer a candidate's campaign a strategic advantage...measure the impact of their campaign; NOT designed to sway undecided voters

purpose of a "**name recognition survey**" - to discover how many people have heard of a potential candidate - While a better-known candidate might use the "name recognition survey" to assess potential success against an incumbent, the survey itself can be utilized by any candidate attempting to gauge voter familiarity

**"wedge issues"** - EX. During his campaign for reelection in 2012, Barack Obama deemphasized his work on health care reform and emphasize employment numbers in the 2012 campaign ...His campaign did not want to focus on an issue that had deep divisions in public opinion ... the rationale for that decision was based on the growing assessment of public opinion... public opinion has increased impact on policy making decisions due to polling

**self-selection** a reference to the ability of respondents to decide whether to participate in surveys - A 1936 straw poll demonstrated the problem of self-selection as only 22 percent of those contacted by mail returned their completed surveys

- ex. a mail-in survey of retirement community members about the privatization of Medicare...The more effort it takes citizens to participate in surveys, the more likely it is that only those with substantial background or interest on the topic will respond

disadvantage of surveying the public using **traditional telephone polls** - Many people do not have landlines - Forty-seven percent of Americans exclusively use cell phones

a polling firm should determine the **population** first ...make other determinations about whose attitudes they wish to measure

- ex. to assess public opinion about the performance of ex. FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy
- ex. if families with children would use school vouchers to send their children to charter schools...ask parent with children under the age of 18
- **Stratified sampling** combines random selection with predetermined weighting of a population's demographic characteristics...Rather than promoting self-selection, stratified sampling utilizes Census data to increase the chances that survey participants are likely voters

**interviewer bias** - unintended influence of the questioner on respondents during in-person interviews...phrasing of the questions themselves can bias an interview in any setting, other factors such as pollster attire, question presentation, and relatability to the interviewee can all impact an in-person poll

## CHAPTER 10 READING STUDY GUIDE

shortcoming of **limited respondent options** - Polls are unable to measure the intensity of feelings about issues; polls can utilize a scientific methodology to obtain information but still offer poll participants a rigid format for answering questions that can potentially constraint their answers

**margin of error** - measure of the accuracy of a public opinion poll; standard deviation is used to calculate margin of error, giving observers a sense of the results if the poll were to be conducted several times

- offers a sense of a poll's accuracy by offering a range +/- in which ultimate results are likely to fall
- EX. In a random sample of 1,000 high school students, 29 percent indicated that they had read the Declaration of Independence at least once, with a margin of error of four percent....It is likely that between 25 and 33 percent of the population have read the Declaration of Independence.

**"Feeling thermometer"** - uses a 0-to-100 scale - a specific, targeted assessment of the degree of their feelings on issues

Americans often have difficulty forming opinions about policies that do not affect them personally unlike those that do affect them like healthcare

- Americans have an easier time assessing their feelings on issues related to morality as they can apply their own individual sentiments to the discussions ex. illegal drug use or crime prevention
- find it more difficult to establish policy positions on topics like foreign affairs or other issues in which they are not well-versed....topics involving the European Central Bank and creditor nations...this doesn't affect them directly

**screening procedure** in a public opinion poll usually take place to find those most knowledgeable about certain topics like ex. the federal budget...designed to weed out poll participants who might lack the knowledge to offer accurate responses to complicated questions

- EX. you are concerned about gauging the public's attitudes about arms-control policy. You believe that the public not only has little information on this complex topic, but also has thought little about it...SO to increase the accuracy of your polling data you implement a screening procedure
- Academic research organizations use screening procedures to determine voter familiarity with more complicated issues; polls are more likely to be inaccurate if respondents answer questions related to issues on which they have little prior knowledge or information

**political socialization** - the process through which individuals acquire their political beliefs and values... political socialization is largely impacted by individuals' demographic characteristics and social influences during their formative years

The most significant demographic traits impacting political opinions are those over which individuals have little control, such as race and ethnicity and gender

- **gender** - a difference in public opinion between men and women EX. Men are more likely to favor military intervention

**Protestant heritage** - the source of the American value of hard work and personal responsibility; The United States has less of a welfare system than many industrialized democracies in other parts of the world, stemming largely from a history of self-reliance dating back to the colonial period

## CHAPTER 10 READING STUDY GUIDE

children - parents exercise the greatest influence on the political socialization from birth to age five

- children develop political orientations as a result of their surroundings and most significant influences...if parents are Republican children will exhibit skepticism of a Democratic president
- child's **peer group** most politically influential during middle and high school
- while school age children are heavily influenced by their academic experiences in regard to political socialization, peer groups are most influential as parental influence declines
- The more exposure children have to their peer groups, the less influential parents become in regard to the socialization process