



Public Opinion, Policy Making and Democratic Responsiveness

Dr. Robert Shapiro

Wallace S. Sayre Professor of Government and Professor of
 International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

September 28, 2018

9:00am – 4:30pm

Summary (Abstract)

What does it mean for a nation to be “democratic”? This workshop examines the notion that in a democracy government policymaking should, to at least some extent, be responsive to the people – the public writ large. This assumes that the public’s opinions deserve to be responded to. This raises both normative and empirical questions: To what extent do government policies reflect the wishes of the public? What are the qualities and characteristics of public opinion that are at issue? Is government responsiveness sufficient to call a country “democratic”? Do we not need to consider what influences public opinion and the nature of these influences, especially the role of political leadership, information, and the mass media?

The workshop’s readings will focus on the United States but the questions examined apply to all nations that call themselves genuine democracies. The workshop will conclude with an analysis of how current political conflict and polarization have raised further questions about the quality of public opinion and political leadership in a democracy.

Outline

- (1) Democracy, Public Opinion and Policymaking
- (2) The Nature of Public Opinion
- (3) Leadership, Education, and Manipulation
- (4) Political Polarization, the Politics of Truth, and the State of Democracy

Required Readings*

Carroll J. Glynn, Susan Herbst, Mark Lindeman, Garrett J. O’Keefe, and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2016. *Public Opinion*. Third edition. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press.

Chapter 9: “Content and Conflict in Public Opinion,” p. 237-291.

<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FD8>

Chapter 10: “Public Opinion and Policymaking,” p. 292-329. (NOTE: This reading is not yet available at the Library. We will do our best to make this chapter available at the workshop on Friday. Please also check <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll> for updates on this item).

Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chapter 9: “Education and Manipulation of Public Opinion,” p. 355-382.

<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2F73>



WSSR WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

●●● DELIBERATING A PUBLIC AGENDA ●●●
 ●●● FOR FEDERAL ELECTION 2019 ●●●



Additional Resources

- Robert Y. Shapiro. 2011. "Public Opinion and American Democracy." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (5): 982-1017.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FCB>
- J. Alexander Branham, Stuart N. Soroka, and Christopher Wlezien. 2017. "When Do the Rich Win?" *Political Science Quarterly* 132 (November): 43-62. <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FCC>
- Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do No Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
 Chapter 1: "Democratic Ideals and Realities," p. 1-20.
- Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2009. "A New Partisan Voter." *The Journal of Politics* 71 (January): 1-24.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FD1>
- Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon. 2008. "Do the Facts Speak for Themselves? Partisan Disagreement as a Challenge to Democratic Competence." *Critical Review* 20 (1-2): 115-139.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FCD>

Some Resources on the Canadian Context

- Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien. 2015. "Electoral Systems and Opinion Representation." *Representation* 51 (3): 273-285. <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FCE>
- Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien. 2004. "Opinion Representation and Policy Feedback: Canada in Comparative Perspective." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37 (3): 531-559.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FCF>
- Christopher Wlezien and Stuart N. Soroka. 2011. "Federalism and Public Responsiveness to Policy." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 41 (1): 31-52. <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2FD0>
- John C. Courtney and David E. Smith. 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien "Public Opinion and Public Policy,"
<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195335354.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195335354-e-15>

*If you are registered for non-credit and are unable to locate the readings, please contact us at wssr@concordia.ca

Workshops on Social Science Research (WSSR)
 1455 de Maisonneuve W. – H1225.30
 Montreal, Qc H3G 1M8
 Telephone: 514-848-2424 x7854, x5473

