Public Opinion, Policy Making and Democratic Responsiveness

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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*
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).

http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF2F73
**Additional Resources**


**Some Resources on the Canadian Context**


Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien “Public Opinion and Public Policy,”  

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