

Midterm Study Guide
POSC 146: Public Opinion
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The midterm will consist of short answer (i.e., one paragraph explaining a concept) and multiple-choice questions. Anything from the text covering the chapters below may be on the exam, but the questions below of course are most likely.

Asher: Chapters 1 & 2

Chapter 1

Why are polls important to the average citizen?

What are push polls, pseudo polls, FRUGging, SUGging? What are the differences between them? Are these polls representative of anything?

Why might a company/organization commission a poll? Are there any differences between commissioned and media polls? Which are more reliable and why?

What are citizens' views of polls? Do they like them or not? Are pollsters very popular with the mass public? Do people prefer Town Hall meetings or polls to determine what people are thinking?

Why do proponents of representative democracy support the idea of polls? Do polls help people learn about what their fellow citizens think? If yes, why is this beneficial?

Chapter 2

What are non-attitudes as defined in Asher? Are issues close to home or remote more likely to bring about non-attitudes? How do some pollsters abuse this? By asking questions the public knows nothing about...

How have non-attitudes been documented? Think Public Affairs Act

When respondents have weak or no genuine opinions, are they more or less susceptible to survey context (wording, format, order, answer categories)?

Why do people with non-attitudes give responses anyway?

What are screening questions and why are they used? What do large collections of middle-category responses tell us?

How is response instability related to non-attitudes? Who are more likely to have non-attitudes, low or high political knowledge people?

Clawson and Oxley: Chapters 1, 4-8

Chapter 1

What is democratic theory? What is classical democratic theory?
What are some attributes that appear in classical models of democracy?

What is popular sovereignty? What is direct democracy? How does it differ today than in Rousseau's time?

What is the Athenian notion of democracy, and why might it not work today? What are the main critiques of classical democratic theory?

What is Democratic Elitism (DE) and how does it differ from classical democratic theory? Which system is the federal system based on? Are DEs worried about low levels of political knowledge or participation?

What is pluralism and are pluralists more similar to Democratic Elitists or classical democratic theory? What is the role of interest groups in pluralism? Know examples of interest groups, such as the NRA, AARP, NAACP.

What is representative democracy? How are the three branches of government/separation of powers a reflection of later variants of Democratic Elitism?

What are factions, in the Madisonian sense?

What is participatory democracy? What critiques do participatory democrats have of democratic elitism and pluralism? Some groups have more power than others, power is not equal. Think of business groups versus other groups.

What is citizen apathy? What do participatory democrats have to say about this and whether it should be accepted or a challenge to be met? But what do skeptics of participatory theory say in response?

What is public opinion? What is the consensus definition? Does polling do a good job of measuring the "public judgment"?

What is an attitude, opinion? What is a belief/value, how are beliefs different from emotions? What is prejudice?

What is party identification? What is the most significant change in party identification over the past 50 years?

What is a closed-ended vs. open-ended question? What is a survey, what is a sample? What is a random sample? What is a panel study? How does Converse use panel studies in his study of belief systems?

Chapter 4:

What is attitude stability? What is attitude change? What is attitude instability? What leads to attitude change? Is the public, as a whole more fickle or more stable?

What is a cross-sectional study? How did Converse measure attitude instability between 1958 – 1960?

What are non-attitudes as defined by Converse? What issues seem to have greater attitude stability? (hint: groups)

What is collective public opinion? How do Page and Shapiro study this? What are the general conclusions? What is the difference between thinking about public opinion as “collective” versus “individual.” What way of thinking about public opinion is more face-saving for the public?

What is presidential approval and how is it measured? Why is it important? What strengths does the president have with high levels of approval?

What are tracking polls? Why would campaigns use tracking polls? Have they increased or decreased over time? What is the phenomenon known as the honeymoon period? What is the rally round the flag effect? Does it explain Bush 1 & 2's high popularity at certain points?

What leads to declines in presidential approval?

What is a utilitarian function in terms of attitudes? What is ego defense, how is prejudice worked into ego defense?

What is a value-expressive function, and social adjustment? How might one persuade someone using functional approaches to attitudes?

Understand the basic Receive-Accept-Sample Model (John Zaller).

What are the roles of elites and elite discourse in this model? What does Zaller mean by reception? What is political awareness? How does acceptance of elite messages influence people with different levels of awareness? What are political predispositions?

What are considerations? How is it theorized that people sample from these considerations?

What is cognitive dissonance theory, and how do people resolve it? Think Drones.

Chapters 5-7

What is ideology? Understand the basic differences between liberals and conservatives? How do scholars think of the two in terms of a scale?

Understand Converse and ideological innocence. What were some of the critiques of Converse?

What is attitude constraint as defined by Converse?

How do groups serve as a useful purpose in public opinion? Can group thinking be ideological?

What is black political ideology? How do radical egalitarianism subscribers differ from black nationalism subscribers? Who is an example of black conservatism?

What are heuristics?

What does Donald Kinder offered as a response to Converse's ostensibly negative findings about public opinion? What are pluralistic roots of public opinion?

What do we know about authoritarianism, as a personality trait and how it relates to attitude development? Know about child-rearing values as a way to measure authoritarianism.

Know the Big Five personality traits and relation to political values.

What is the somewhat surprising of self-interest? Why might rich liberals not support tax cuts?

What are egalitarianism, individualism, and why are they important? What is moral traditionalism, do you think it has increased or decreased over time?

How do historical events shape public opinion? Think Vietnam War and social protest.

Know that groups play a central role in understanding public opinion? What is group membership? What is ascriptive group membership?

What are the two ways scholars study groups?

Who are more Democratic, whites or blacks? Why are there such differences across racial groups when it comes to attitudes about some topics?

What is old-fashioned racism? Racial resentment? Know the five elements of symbolic racism.

What are race-targeted policies? Race-neutral policies? Why might some race-neutral policies become racialized? Know the welfare case. What are race-coded policies? How did Gilens test this? What is the racialization of poverty and why is this important in study of public opinion?

What is group consciousness/racial identity/linked fate? Do blacks, Asians, or whites exhibit more group consciousness?

What is the black utility heuristic and is it rational, why?

What is pan-ethnic identity?

Chapter 8

Define political knowledge

What are the five questions that are often used to measure public opinion (note will be a multiple choice question where 3 are wrong and 1 is right, kind of thing)

Why does political knowledge matter for democracy?

What is low-information rationality?

What are three types of political knowledge

Know about informed, uninformed, misinformed. How did misinformed opinions affect country's decision to invade Iraq? What does this tell us about the role political knowledge plays in public opinion?

What is the difference between a generalist/specialist? Are citizens more of one than the other?

Why are some citizens more knowledgeable than others?

Asher Chapters 3-5

Do citizens use wording language to help them answer the question? How do response categories matter in the response process? Know about order and context.

What is a compound question and why is it problematic?

What is pretesting? What about double negative questions? What is branching?

What are multiple-items and indexing? What's the norm of reciprocity?

Broadly, what is a sample? Why is a sample representative of millions? What are some common sampling techniques? How is a probabilistic sample different from a non-probabilistic sample?

What's a focus group? Why do researchers use them?

What is sampling error? (Don't need to know the equation)

In terms of data collection, know why different modes matter, know about the possibility of human error in the recording process. What are the different ways we collect data (i.e., face-to-face, telephone)? Know about interviewer effects

Likely voter versus registered voter models. What is the fuss about (non)-response rates and why does it matter? Know the issues with cell-phone usage and how that influences response rates. What's a call disposition? Why do survey researchers weight their sample?