

GV205

Measuring Public Opinion

Introduction

15 January, 2018

Joe Greenwood

YouGov

[@NiceOneCombo](https://twitter.com/NiceOneCombo)



Overview

- Introduction
- Module Information
- Public Opinion:
 - What is it?
 - Why study it?
 - How do we measure it?
- Extra-Curricular Activities
- Break and Sign-Ups
- Research Basics:
 - Research Question and Puzzle
 - Theory
 - Hypotheses and Operationalization
 - Data Collection
 - Data Analysis
 - Evaluation/Publication/Revision



Introduction: Teachers

- Raynee Gutting
 - rg17437@essex.ac.uk
- Joe Greenwood
 - jgreenm@essex.ac.uk
- Adam Peresman
 - ap16848@essex.ac.uk



Introduction: Public Opinion

- What is public opinion?
 - Can you provide a definition of public opinion?
- Can you think of an example...
 - ...public opinion being represented accurately?
 - ...public opinion being misrepresented?
- If you could ask one question to the British public, what would it be?



Module Information: Lectures and Labs

- Weekly lectures:
 - Mondays, 15:00 – 16:00
 - 4.722
 - Led by Raynee or Joe
 - Theory and information on the topic, with some exercises
- Weekly labs:
 - Mondays, 16:00 – 17:00
 - IT Lab J
 - Led by Raynee, Joe, or Adam
 - Practical exercises relating the topic using Qualtrics and RStudio



Module Information: Office Hours

- Raynee:
 - Wednesdays
 - 13:00 – 14:00
 - 5A.316
- Joe
 - Mondays
 - 17:00 – 18:00,
 - 5A.316
- Adam
 - Mondays,
 - 12:00 – 13:00
 - 5A.214



Module Information: Moodle and Email

- Moodle:
 - Lecture slides
 - Weekly readings
 - Assignment details
 - Discussion on forums
- Email:
 - Please check your Essex account
 - Contact Adam as a first port of call
 - Expect a response within one working day



Module Information: Assignments

- Assignment 1 (50%): Questionnaire design
 - Due 05 March 2018, 9:45am.
 - This involves designing and evaluating a questionnaire to address a particular research question.
 - You will be expected to meet with Raynee, Joe, or Adam during office hours to discuss this assignment.
- Assignment 2 (50%): Analyzing public opinion
 - Due 30 April 2018, 9:45am.
 - This involves analyzing data collected via the above questionnaire, and reporting the results and conclusions from that analysis.



Module Information: Reading

- Outlined in the syllabus
- Provided on Moodle
- Split into:
 - Required reading
 - Other useful readings
- Advice:
 - Don't worry if some of the (statistical) content is hard to understand initially;
 - Read the texts before the lectures and labs (skipping the inaccessible bits);
 - Revisit the readings after the lectures and labs to solidify understanding.
- Ask us if you need clarification!



Module Information: Overview

- Public opinion: What is it and can it be wrong?
 - Weeks 16, 17, 18, and 21
- Measurement (data generation): How do we generate public opinion data? From question wording to the various modes of collection.
 - Weeks 19, 20, and 22
- Measurement (data analysis): How do we draw inferences from our data and how can we use it?
 - Weeks 23, 24, and 25



Module Information: Schedule

- Week 16 (15 January), Introduction
- Week 17 (22 January), Public Opinion and Ideology
- Week 18 (29 January), How People Answer Survey Questions
- Week 19 (05 February), From Samples to Populations
- Week 20 (12 February), Modes of Survey and Total Survey Error Approach
- Week 21 (19 February), Knowledge and Misperceptions
- Week 22 (26 February), Asking Sensitive Questions
- Week 23 (05 March), Imperfect Samples
- Week 24 (12 March), Survey Experiments
- Week 25 (19 March), Putting it all together

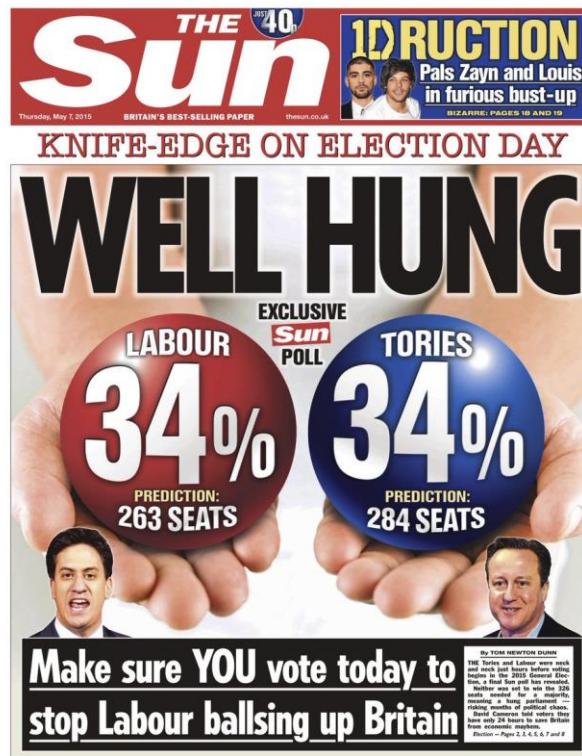


Public Opinion: What is it?

- **Public Opinion:** “We define public opinion as the preferences of the adult population on matters of relevance to government.” (Erikson and Tedin 2007, Chapter 1)
- **Measurement:**
 - General – Ascertain the size, amount, or degree of something, or assess the extent, value, or effect of something.
 - Here – The scientific process of estimating the views of a population on a topic of interest.



Public Opinion: What is it?



Shock poll predicts Tory losses

Controversial YouGov estimate points to hung parliament with 20 fewer seats for May

Sam Coates Deputy Political Editor

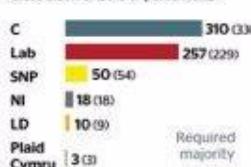
The Conservative Party could be in line to lose 20 seats and Labour gain nearly 30 in next week's general election, according to new modelling by one of the country's leading pollsters.

YouGov's first constituency-by-constituency estimate of the election result predicts that the Tories would fall short of an overall majority by 16 seats, leading to a hung parliament.

The central projection of the model, which allows for a wide margin of error,

Latest projections

(Actual number of seats at time of dissolution of 2015-17 parliament)



manifesto, including plans to make more elderly voters pay for home care.

YouGov's model puts the Tories on course to win 310 seats, down from the 330 they held when the election was called. Labour would get 257 seats, up from 229, the Liberal Democrats ten, up from nine, the SNP 50, down from 54, the Greens one and Plaid Cymru three.

This would leave the Tories 16 seats short of the 326 votes they need for an overall majority in the Commons.

The poll allows for big variations, however, and suggests that the Tories

pointed to significant "churn" in voting intentions. But Stephan Shakespeare, its chief executive, said that the model had been publicly tested during the EU referendum campaign last year, when it always had Leave ahead.

The model is based on 50,000 interviews over the course of a week, with voters from a panel brought together by YouGov. This allows the pollster to assess the intention of every type of voter, from where they live to how they voted in the EU referendum, their age and social background, to

of 50 or more, despite an "atrocious" campaign, and insisted that anger over the manifesto was fading.

A Labour figure in the Midlands said that while the Tory social care blunder had helped, Jeremy Corbyn's unpopularity continued to deter natural Labour voters and the party would be losing rather than gaining seats in the region.

Other pollsters predicted a convincing victory for the Tories. Andrew Hawkins, chairman of ComRes, said: "If voters behave in the way they broadly did in 2015 then the Conservatives

Public Opinion: Why Study It?

- “The basis of our government opinion of the people.”

Thomas Jefferson (Letter, 1767)

- “Public opinion is the thermometer a monarch should constantly consult.”

Napoleon Bonaparte (Maxims, 1804-1815)

- “A government can be no better than the public opinion which sustains it.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt (speech, 1936)



Public Opinion: Why Study It?

- Public opinion is a fundamental element of politics:
 - “I want to find these polling companies and I want to sue them for my stomach ulcers because of what they put me through.” (David Cameron)
- Public opinion has a key position in academic research:
 - Public Opinion Quarterly; Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties; International Journal of Public Opinion Research.
- Measuring public opinion is highly sought-after skill:
 - Data Design Executive – London
 - Are you passionate about data collection? Could you develop tactical strategies around adding new data sources to our data products?



Public Opinion: Why is it Important?

- Important for politics:

- “In between elections, polls can help politicians understand voters’ lives, hopes and fears. But at the end of the day, MPs and MSPs should have the courage to stand up for their convictions, not cringe and cower in the face of unwelcome polls.”

Peter Kellner (*The use and abuse of opinion polls*, 2015)

- Important for academia:

- “I assume that a key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens.”

Robert Dahl (*Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, 1970)

- Important for employment:

- “I keep saying the sexy job in the next ten years will be statisticians. People think I'm joking, but who would've guessed that computer engineers would've been the sexy job of the 1990s?”

Hal Varian (*How the Web challenges managers*, 2009)



Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

- The Harrisburg Pennsylvanian
 - Conducts first reported opinion poll in 1824
 - Finds Andrew Jackson (66%) ahead of John Adams (34%)
 - Based on 504 responses from Harrisburg residents
- Literary Digest in 1936
 - Correctly anticipated the US Presidential winners in 1920, 1924, 1928, 1932
 - Finds Alf Landon (57%) ahead of Franklin D. Roosevelt (43%)
 - Sent postcard ballots to 10 million readers and citizens, 2.2 million responded



Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

- George Gallup
 - Beat The Literary Digest in predicting the 1936 US Presidential election
 - Beat conventional wisdom in predicting the 1945 UK general election
 - Incorrectly predicted a Thomas E. Dewey victory over Harry S. Truman in the close 1948 US Presidential election (though with more precise figures)
 - Focused on demographic quality, not quantity, of sample (using quotas)
- Since then
 - 1992 UK general election (hung Parliament, 'shy Tories')
 - 2009 Time magazine world's most influential person (moot)
 - 2015 UK general election...



Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

- We would like to know what the public thinks or how it feels.
- Interviewing all individuals is not feasible, so we need to **sample**:
 - We want a sample that is representative of the *target population*;
 - ‘Gold standard’ approach: random selection of cases from the population (simple random sample, or probability sample);
 - Common approach: active sampling of a representative set of cases from amongst a voluntary sub-set (panel) of the population;
 - Assumptions are being made.



Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

- Sampling error is an inherent part of sampling:

Table 2.1 | Sampling Error and Sample Size Employing Simple Random Sample*

Sample Size	Sampling Error (plus or minus)
2,430	2.0
1,536	2.5
1,067	3.0
784	3.5
600	4.0
474	4.5
384	5.0
267	6.0
196	7.0
150	8.0
119	9.0
96	10.0
42	15.0

*This computation is based on the assumption of a simple random sample (SRS) with a dichotomous opinion that splits 50/50 and a 95% confidence level.

Source: Erikson and Tedin, p. 31.



Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

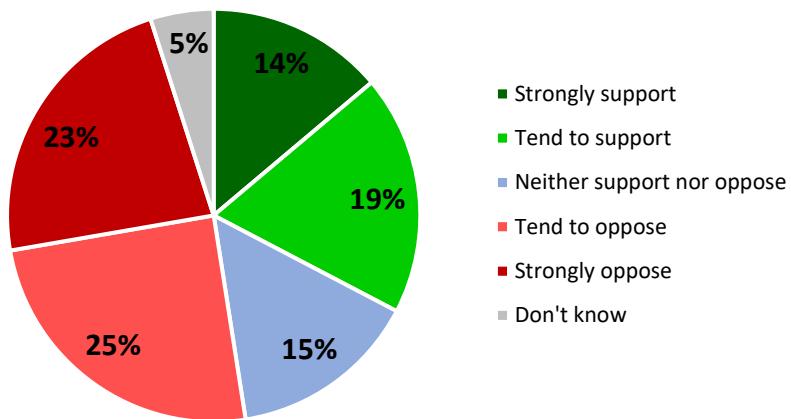
- Random sampling is hard:
 - No single list with all the names
 - Only addresses and phones (who does one pick?)
 - If not random then it is possible that opinion and the probability of participating may be correlated
- Various modes:
 - Face-to-face (in the street or at home)
 - Phone (random digit dialling)
 - Online (opt-in surveys with need for heavy weighting)



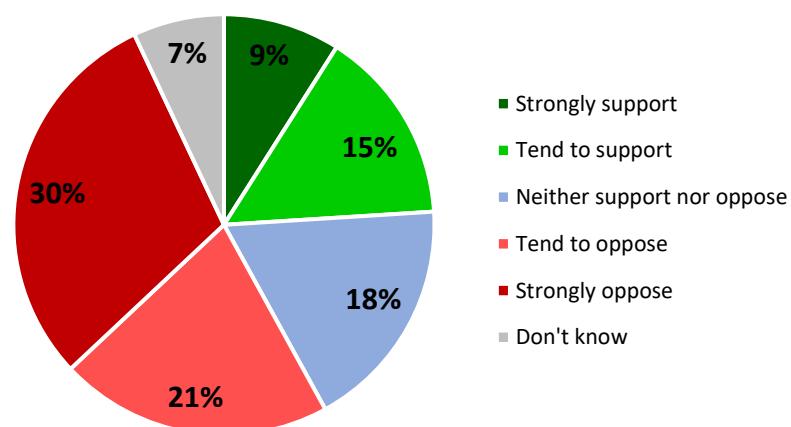
Public Opinion: How do we measure it?

- Question wording matters (multiple stimuli, order, balance, middle category, response acquiescence)

To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose giving 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote?



To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose reducing the voting age from 18 to 16?



- Social desirability (modes, special asking techniques)



Extra-Curricular Activities

YouGov Office Trip:

We will visit the YouGov office in London on Wednesday the 21st of February, with travel and lunch provided for all students who wish to attend. The visit will include a tour of the office, presentations from key teams involved in the company's polling activities, and question and answer sessions with YouGov staff.

Daily Polling Questions:

As a cohort, you will have the opportunity to include five questions on a YouGov Daily Poll of 1,500 British adults. You will craft your own survey questions around a central theme to be included in a nationally representative survey. More details will be provided as the course unfolds.

