

Public Opinion



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What is public opinion?

- An amalgamation of individual preferences or evaluations
- Could relate to policies or politicians
- Distinct from predispositions or ideologies

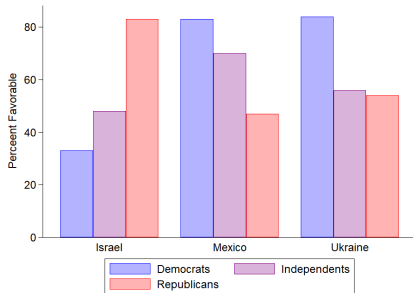


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Why does public opinion matter in government?

- Principles of “popular sovereignty,” “legitimacy,” “accountability,” and “representation.”
- Public opinion is a crucial “input” for policy-making



Source: Gallup (02/24/25)

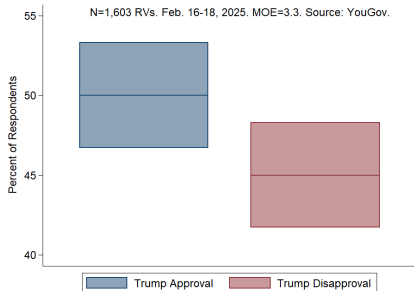


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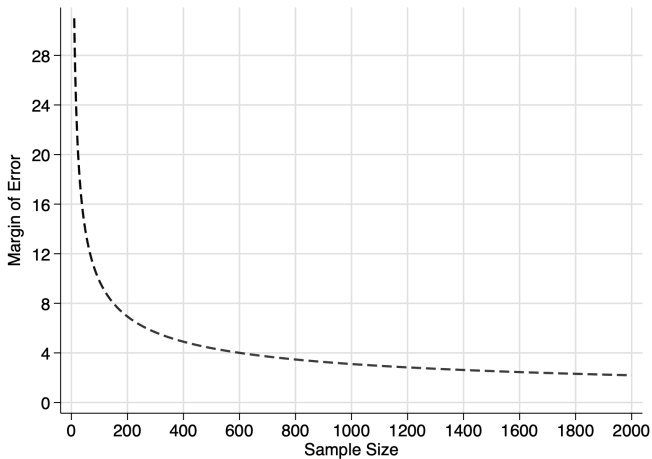
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How do we measure public opinion?

- Probabilistic vs nonprobabilistic sampling
- Sample size and margin of error
- Can be biased by: Question wording/ordering, sampling procedure, non-response, open/closed questions
- Types of polling: Benchmark, tracking, push, focus groups, exit



Sample size and margin of error



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Where do Political Attitudes Come from?

- Socialization
 - Upbringing
 - Religion
 - Group Attachment
 - Income/Occupation
 - Education, etc.
- Party ID
- Elites
- Ideology
- Sociobiology?

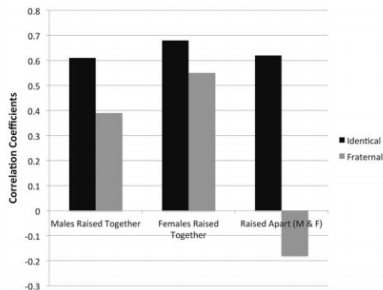


Figure 1. Correlations between the Political Orientations of Identical and Fraternal Twins, Raised Together and Apart.



Conclusion

- How much do politicians follow public opinion?
- How much does public opinion follow political elites?
- When may politicians “get away” with disobeying public opinion?
- When must they toe the line?



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