

Understanding European Public Opinion

Opinion Polls and their Meaning. Towards a Transnational European Public Sphere?

Course context, aims

Public policy debates on a European level need solid evidences. Evidence-based policy research tools are accessible and should belong to the repertoire of all professionals. The course makes no assumptions of prior statistical or methodological expertise, and helps students with various levels of empirical skills to utilize internet-based information sources. By concentrating on a very rich information source – the Eurobarometer survey series – its aim and focus is to provide practical know-how and skills of using empirical materials for policy discussions.

We will look at 4 different public policy issue that shapes European-level discussions. The semester will coincide with the first European Parliamentary election where the voters are distributed in 25 countries. We will link the issues and debates to understand better the different reactions within this new electorate. In practice we will look into the similarities and differences in values and attitudes along national, social, regional and demographic lines.

The four policy area we will choose will be typical of the main policy debates any public intellectual / professional could be engaged.

Course methodology

There will be only light reading assignments – the emphasis will be on practicing the skills of finding relevant information and indicators that are related to the policy issues chosen.

We will have access via the internet to a specially prepared time-series and cross-sectional data set from the latest Eurobarometer surveys from all 25 countries. The students will be encouraged to form teams – and the seminar work will be broken down into 4 units. Within each unit we will concentrate in “translating” a different policy debate into empirical indicators – and linking empirical evidences to policy arguments.

The teams would produce a short “policy brief” with closely documented arguments for both side of the debate.

Different members of the teams would take up different arguments and by the end of the semester each student would prepare a max. 5 page paper.

The choice of the style of the paper is up to the student – it can be either an executive summary of the differences within Europe, a background executive briefing paper or arguing for a position utilizing data from the surveys.

I would offer optional tutorials before or after the course sessions, advising on the paper, helping with technical questions. Using publicly available data visualization and mapping tools and internet resources, the students should gain a practical knowledge that can be utilized in various situations.

MODULE I.

Policy debates on Europe's role in the world – War and Peace; Differences and similarities in the public's reactions in Old and New member countries

For the published research reports see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion

for a specially prepared to be used for developing arguments for the team position papers use:

<http://tech.gallup.hu/eu>

(passwords will be provided at the first meeting)

MODULE II

Trust in national and European institutions – information about European policy issues, engagement with the policy debates, social and regional differences in the level of political participation. Exploring the various sources of information available that informs the policy debates about the issues of EU governance and EU Parliamentary elections

Good collections for summary positions:

<http://www.euobserver.com>

<http://www.euractiv.com>

<http://www.ceps.be>

There will be a specially prepared set of data to be explored for supporting the positions

<http://euvision.gallup-europe.be/eurovision>

MODULE III.

Where does the European stands on issues of health, food and environment policy? The teams will develop short policy briefs on issues of genetically modified food / tobacco control / environmental protection positions, using survey data from old and new members countries.

Detailed research reports are available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion

and exploratory data sets will be available at <http://www.gallup-europe.be/data>

MODULE IV.

Living and working conditions – subjective wellbeing in Europe.

This module will review attempts at linking policies to improve European quality of life with improving living and working conditions. We will review the various sources of survey data on life quality, working conditions and employment prospect. The policy briefs to be developed will look at the perceptions of the labor market and differences on the subjective labor market experience of the various age groups in the various countries – and how it relates to the subject well-being.

For the various policy debates on the subject:

<http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net>

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/>

Data to be used will be available at

<http://tech.gallup.hu/eu> and <http://www.gallup-europe.be/data>

Each student is expected to participate in a team-work developing a short (max. 3 page) policy brief on each topics.