

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER**  
**Unit Specification**

**1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

<b>Title</b>	Public Opinion
<b>Unit code</b>	
<b>Credit Rating</b>	
<b>Level</b>	MA in Political Science and International Relations
<b>Contact hours</b>	21
<b>Pre-requisite units</b>	PS021 Political Philosophy
<b>Co-requisite units</b>	all elective course units
<b>School responsible</b>	Moscow School of Social & Economic Sciences
<b>Member of staff responsible:</b>	Dr. Greg Yudin

**2. AIMS**

**This unit aims to:** Establish the link between the concept of public opinion as it stands in modern political thought, and the technologies of public opinion research and production. Students are expected to develop critical and informed attitude towards the place that public opinion and public opinion research occupy in contemporary societies. This unit prepares students to methodological evaluation of the data gathered through public opinion research and provides necessary basis for analysing the role of social sciences in modern politics.

**3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIT**

This unit combines methodological and social-theoretical approaches to public opinion research. Challenging Pierre Bourdieu's famous claim that public opinion doesn't exist, the unit starts from the observation that public opinion is in fact part of modern political reality and asks in which sense it can be said to exist. In order to answer this question, this unit draws on conceptualisation of public opinion in modern political thought, relates the notion of public opinion to other basic sociological concepts and discovers ontological presuppositions on which public opinion research has effectively relied. The unit encourages reading and commenting texts of political theorists, sociologists, but also of ideologists and founding fathers of public opinion research. Students are provided with various tools of studying public opinion as an important component of modern political life.

**Preliminary topics**

- Session 1. Historical and philosophical origins of the concept of public opinion
- Session 2. Where and when did the public opinion polls emerge?
- Session 3. Classical critiques of public opinion in modern political thought
- Session 4. Public opinion in the global world: contemporary discussions in social and political theory
- Session 5. Representation and representative sampling in public opinion polling
- Session 6. False predictions, biases, misunderstandings and other key challenges to polling
- Session 7. Public opinion polls as a political technology

## Core Readings

1. Allport F. Polls and the Science of Public Opinion // The Public Opinion Quarterly. 1940. Vol. 4, No. 2. P. 249-257.
2. Allport F. Towards a Science of Public Opinion // The Public Opinion Quarterly. 1937. Vol. 1, No. 1. P. 7-23.
3. Berinsky A. Silent Voices: Opinion Polls and Political Representation in America. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
4. Bourdieu P. Public Opinion Does Not Exist // Communication and Class Struggle. Vol I. / Ed. by A. Mattelart and S. Siegelau. New York: International General, 1979. P. 124-130.
5. Champagne P. Faire l'opinion. Le nouvel espace politique. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990.
6. Goyder J. The Silent Minority: Nonrespondents in Sample Surveys. Boulder: Perseus Books, 1987.
7. Green J. The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
8. Habermas J. Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Massachusetts, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.
9. Herbst S. Numbered Voices: How Opinion Poling Has Shaped American Politics. London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
10. Laclau E., Mouffe Ch. Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics / Second Edition. London; New York: Verso, 2001.
11. Lazarsfeld P. Public Opinion and the Classical Tradition // The Public Opinion Quarterly. 1957. Vol. 21, No. 1. P. 39-53.
12. Lippman W. Public Opinion. Harcourt: Brace, 1922.
13. Locke J. Two Treatises of Government. Kila: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
14. Noelle-Neumann E. The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin. The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
15. Osborne T., Rose N. Do the Social Sciences Create Phenomena? The Example of Public Opinion Research // British Journal of Sociology. 1999. Vol. 50, No. 3. P. 367-396.
16. Splichal S. Public Opinion: Developments and Controversies in the Twentieth Century. New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.
17. Shapiro R. Public Opinion and American Democracy // The Public Opinion Quarterly. 2011. Vol. 75, No. 5. P. 982-1017.
18. Tarde G. The Public and the Crowd // G. Tarde. On Communication and Social Influence. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969.
19. Tönnies F. On Public Opinion (Selections and Analysis) / Ed. by H. Hardt, S. Splichal. Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
20. Urbinati N. Democracy Disfigured. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

## 4. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Category of outcome	Students should/will be able to:
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Knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- conceive of public opinion as a historically contingent phenomenon; understand conditions of its appearance and modification;</li> <li>- conceive of multiple notions of public opinion in modern political theories; understand their social-historical origins;</li> <li>- understand the relationship between the notion of public opinion and other basic concepts of social theory;</li> <li>- know main theoretical underpinnings of public opinion research, such as representation, sampling, polling, electoral predictions</li> </ul>
Intellectual skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interpret the raw data and public releases of public opinion polls;</li> <li>- interpret various modes of use of public opinion polls in politics;</li> <li>- analyse the function of sociological expertise in political field</li> </ul>
Practical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prepare and evaluate research design for public opinion polls</li> <li>- evaluate the quality of public opinion polls</li> <li>- write well-structured and problem-focused academic papers on the historical significance of public opinion and public opinion research;</li> <li>- participate in academic and public discussions, critically assess the use of sociological expertise by public intellectuals</li> </ul>
Transferable skills and personal qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- navigate through the data of public opinion polls and related academic resources;</li> <li>- thin critically and reflect on the position of social scientist in changing political environment</li> </ul>

## 5. LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESSES (INCLUDING THE USE OF E-LEARNING)

Contact hours: lectures (50%) and tutorials (50%)  
Collective reading and commenting in the classroom  
One essay (homework)  
Students are encouraged to enter in e-mail communication with tutor for consultations on readings list as well as developing original argument when preparing essays

## 6. ASSESSMENT (INCLUDING THE USE OF E-LEARNING)

Assessment task	Length	Weighting within unit (if relevant)
essay	5000 words	80%
exam	1000 words	20%

<b>Date of current version</b>	20 November, 2017
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Approved by Deans' meeting	
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