

# Political Science 10: Introduction to American Politics

## Week 3

Taylor Carlson  
tfeenstr@ucsd.edu

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# Plan for the Day

- Reading Quiz
- Go over learning outcomes
- Announcements
- Answer questions from lecture this week
- Discuss Zaller (2003): “Coming to Grips with V.O. Key’s Concept of Latent Opinion”

# Reading Quiz

- Clearly write your name at the top of the quiz
- Turn your quiz over when you are finished
- Good luck!

By the end of section today, you should be able to:

- Define public opinion
- Define and explain the concept of latent opinion
- Explain whether and when public opinion and latent opinion are meaningful
  - Explain how this relates to latent opinion
  - Explain how this relates to the notion of representative government
  - Describe the conditions under which politicians listen to (or ignore) public opinion

- Reminder: Office Hours are Wednesdays 9am-11am in SSB 341, or by appointment ([tfeenstr@ucsd.edu](mailto:tfeenstr@ucsd.edu))

# Questions??

What questions do you have from lecture this week?

# What is public opinion?

“Those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed.” (LAP Glossary, p. 685, LAP Chapter 10, p. 401, citing V.O. Key)

- “private persons”
- “governments”
- “prudent to heed”

# What is latent opinion?

“Latent opinion is opinion that might exist at some point in the future in response to the decision makers’ actions and may perhaps result in political damage or even defeat at the polls.” (Zaller, 2003, p. 311 paraphrasing V.O. Key)

- According to Zaller and Key, is public opinion, as measured by the polls, a good indicator of latent opinion?
  - No. Why?
- Examples?
  - Propensity of voters to “punish” presidents at the polls for bad economic performance (or reward for good economic performance)
  - Rally around the flag effect
  - Propensity to resist painful trade-offs and punish politicians who force choices



# When are politicians constrained by public opinion?

Responsive to Public Opinion  
(polls)

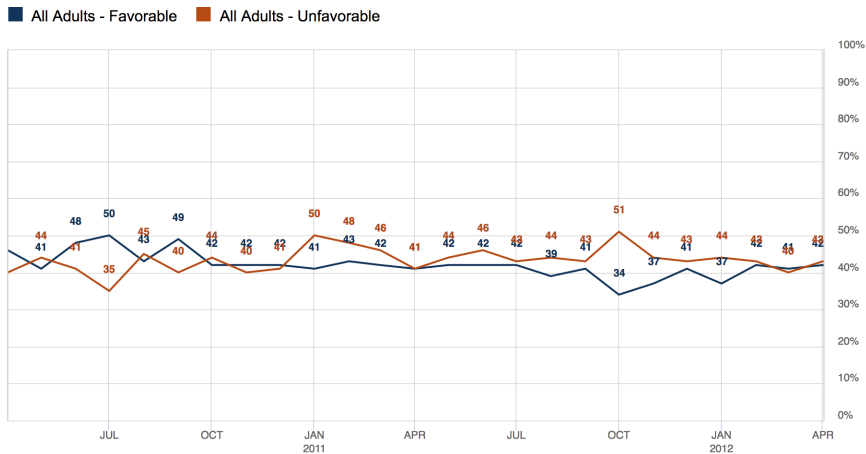
Responsive to Latent Opinion  
(ignore polls)

# A More Recent Example: the ACA (AKA Obamacare)

- Affordable Care Act or Obamacare? (53 seconds in)
- Some data supporting this (September 2013 poll)
- Let's look at the public opinion on the ACA/Obamacare over time

# A More Recent Example: the ACA (AKA Obamacare)

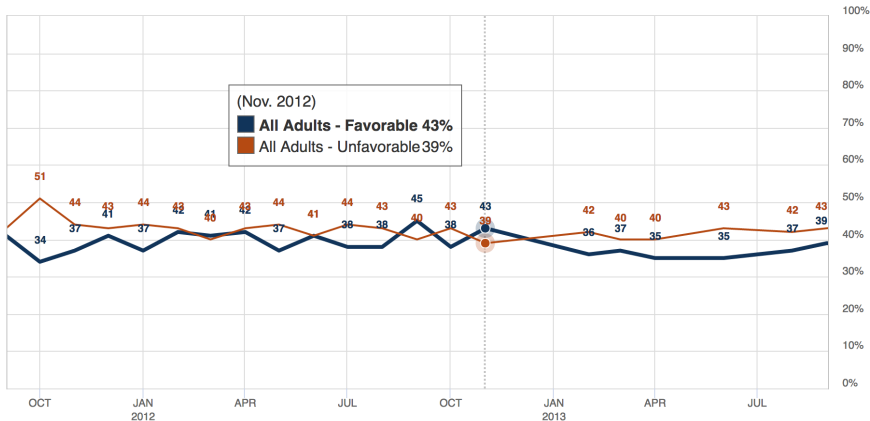
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll



# A More Recent Example: the ACA (AKA Obamacare)

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll

■ All Adults - Favorable ■ All Adults - Unfavorable



# Bringing it all together

- What does this Obamacare/ACA example tell us about whether public opinion about the ACA is meaningful? Do you think President Obama was responding to public or latent opinion? What about members of Congress?
- Thinking more broadly, what does Zaller's proposition about when presidents should respond to public vs. latent opinion tell us about representative government? Would you expect this to apply to other politicians as well?
- Should we continue to measure public opinion?