public opinion & political behavior

PSCI 3051.001
SPRING 2018
UNIVERSITY CLUB 4
MWF 10:00 – 10:50 A.M.

DR. JENNIFER WOLAK
242 KETCHUM HALL
wolakj@colorado.edu
OFFICE HOURS: M W 11 A.M. -12 P.M.
& BY APPOINTMENT

This class concerns the joy and magic that is the study of public opinion. In many ways, public opinion is the currency of a representative democracy. It is the expression of what people expect, desire, and think of their government. And it is what politicians follow, influence, and are held accountable to. Throughout the course, we will consider the structure and dynamics of public opinion, analyzing both what influences it, as well as how it shapes other aspects of politics and public life. We will begin by thinking about how we measure public opinion and the methodology of public opinion polling. Next, we will consider how the public forms opinions about politics – what people know about politics, how they organize their beliefs, and why it matters. We will then investigate the factors in the political world influence and shape public opinion, including the effects of the media, political rhetoric, and social forces. Finally, we will explore the consequences of public opinion – for citizen participation in politics, for the actions of political leaders, and for representation.

D2L is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at **learn.colorado.edu**. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

- Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2016. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.
- A set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the course website.

expectations

You are encouraged to be an active participant in class! Please feel free to raise questions at any point during class, including matters of clarification, theoretical points, or topics to address in class discussion. You should also keep in touch by e-mail or by visiting office hours if you have any questions about course expectations or the material covered in class.

You are also expected to maintain proper classroom etiquette. This includes respecting the opinions of others even if you disagree, not talking out of turn, putting away newspapers and crossword puzzles during lecture, turning off cell phones before class, and not disrupting the class if arriving late.

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will be responsible for the following:

PARTICIPATION, SHORT ASSIGNMENTS, AND QUIZZES *(worth 25% of your final grade)*

Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Absences will lower your participation grade. We will also have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade, and many weeks we will have short quizzes on the readings. We will have a few short homework assignments as well.

RESEARCH PAPER *(worth 30% of your final grade)*

The paper assignment for the class involves analyzing survey data to better understand the roots of some aspect of public opinion or political behavior. Paper guidelines will be detailed in a separate handout.

THREE EXAMS *(each worth 15% of your final grade)*

There will be two midterm exams and a final exam.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at disabilityservices.colorado.edu.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at honorcode.colorado.edu. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism, citation style, and writing in political science is also posted on the course website. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Council for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).

the nature and the measurement of public opinion

WHY STUDY PUBLIC OPINION?

Wednesday, January 17 – Friday, January 19

Introduction to the class and the study of public opinion.

MEASURING ATTITUDES THROUGH SURVEYS

Monday, January 22 – Friday, January 26

How people answer survey questions, how we sample, the challenges of survey administration.

- Asher, Herbert. 2016. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 9th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 4 and Chapter 8.

HOW PEOPLE THINK ABOUT POLITICS

Monday, January 29 – Friday, February 2

The role of citizens in a democracy. How much do people know about politics?

- Berelson, Bernard. 1952. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:313-330.
- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 8.
- Schudson, Michael. 2000. "America's Ignorant Voters." *The Wilson Quarterly* 24(2):16-23.

HOW PEOPLE ORGANIZE THEIR BELIEFS

Monday, February 5 – Friday, February 9

Ideology. How organized and coherent are people's beliefs?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 5.

PARTISANSHIP

Monday, February 12 – Wednesday, February 14

Party identification's role in politics, party polarization in the electorate

- Abrams, Samuel J., and Morris P. Fiorina. 2017. "Party Sorting: The Foundations of Polarized Politics." In James A. Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka, eds., *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Friday, February 16: Exam 1

what influences public opinion?

WHERE DO ATTITUDES COME FROM?

Monday, February 19 – Friday, February 23

The origins of political beliefs. How self-interest, personality, and socialization shape political perspectives.

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 2 and chapter 6.
- Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106(3):517-532.

THE ROLE OF GROUPS, ATTITUDE STABILITY, AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

Monday, February 26 – Friday, March 2

The influence of social groups, the stability and instability of political opinions, changes in attitudes over time

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 4.
- Burns, Nancy, and Donald Kinder. 2012. "Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

MEDIA EFFECTS, POLITICAL RHETORIC, AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

Monday, March 19 – Wednesday, March 21

The consequences of the media, elite rhetoric and campaigns on how people see politics.

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 3.
- Sides, John, and Jake Haselswerdt. 2016. "Campaigns and Elections." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

PUBLIC APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS

Monday, March 12 – Friday, March 16

The origins of public approval of government. How people want government to work.

- Fenno, Richard E. 1975. "If, as Ralph Nader Says, Congress Is 'the Broken Branch,' How Come We Love our Congressmen So Much?" In Norman J. Ornstein, ed., *Congress in Change: Evolution and Reform*. New York: Praeger.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Monday, March 5 – Wednesday, March 9

Why do people trust or mistrust government? And does it matter if they trust their leaders?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 11.

Friday, March 23: Exam 2

Monday, March 26 – Friday, March 30: Spring break – class does not meet.

political action and the consequences of public opinion

DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Monday, April 2 – Friday, April 6

Support for democratic principles. Why do people try to limit the rights of others?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapters 9 and 10.

POLITICAL TALK AND DELIBERATION

Monday, April 9 – Friday, April 13

What are the virtues of talking with people who disagree with you? Why do people avoid it?

- Mutz, Diana C. 2002. "Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice." *American Political Science Review* 96:111-126.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2002. "On a Danger of Deliberative Democracy." *Daedalus* 131(4):120-124.

VOTER TURNOUT

Monday, April 16 – Friday, April 20

Why do people participate in elections? And why do some avoid politics?

- Lewis-Beck, Michael S., William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 5.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Monday, April 23 – Friday, April 27

Explaining participation in politics and in civic life

- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2012. *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.

REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

Monday, April 30 – Wednesday, May 2

To what degree does public opinion influence policy outcomes?

- Clawson and Oxley, chapter 12.

Sunday, May 6: Final exam (1:30 - 4 p.m.)