

public opinion & political behavior

PSCI 3051.001
FALL 2018
MUENZINGER E431
MWF 11:00 – 11:50 A.M.

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OFFICE HOURS: M W 1 P.M. -2 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 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 canvas.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, the readings include 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?

Monday, August 27 – Friday, August 31

Introduction to the class and the study of public opinion.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Wednesday, September 5 – Friday, September 7

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.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 2.

CIVIC COMPETENCE

Monday, September 10 – Friday, September 14

Do citizens learn what they need to know?

- Schudson, Michael. 2000. "America's Ignorant Voters." *The Wilson Quarterly* 24(2):16-23.
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88:63-76.
- Flynn, D.J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2017. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics." *Advances in Political Psychology* 38:127-150.

HOW PEOPLE ORGANIZE THEIR BELIEFS

Monday, September 17 – Friday, September 21

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

- Kinder, Donald R., and Nathan P. Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal Nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-2.
- 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 7.

PARTISANSHIP

Monday, September 24 – Wednesday, September 26

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, September 28: Exam 1

what influences public opinion?

WHERE DO ATTITUDES COME FROM?

Monday, October 1 – Friday, October 5

The origins of political beliefs. How personality and socialization shape political perspectives.

- Mondak, Jeffery J., and Matthew V. Hibbing. 2016. "Personality and Public Opinion." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.
- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71:782-799.

THE ROLE OF GROUPS

Monday, October 8 – Friday, October 12

The influence of social groups, and the role of self-interest

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

Monday, October 15 – Friday, October 19

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

- Iyengar, Shanto. 2016. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. p. 240-269.
- 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, October 22 – Friday, October 26

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

- Zaller, John R. 1998. "Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31:182-189.
- Mutz, Diana C., and Gregory Flemming. 1999. "How Good People Make Bad Collectives: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Public Attitudes Toward Congress." In Joseph Cooper, ed., *Congress and the Decline of Public Trust*. Boulder: Westview Press. p. 79-99.

THE ORIGINS OF POLICY PREFERENCES

Monday, October 29 – Wednesday, October 31

Macro politics. Changes in public preferences on policy. Issue evolution.

- Stimson, James A. 2015. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Friday, November 2: Exam 2

political action and the consequences of public opinion

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Monday, November 5 – Friday, November 9

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

- Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 5.
- Gibson, James L. 2008. "Intolerance and Political Repression in the United States: A Half Century after McCarthyism." *American Journal of Political Science* 52:96-108.

POLITICAL TALK AND DELIBERATION

Monday, November 12 – Friday, November 16

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.

Monday, November 19 – Friday, November 23: Fall break – class does not meet.

VOTER TURNOUT

Monday, November 26 – Friday, November 30

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.
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, University Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Monday, December 3 – Friday, December 7

Explaining participation in politics and in civic life

- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, University Press. Chapters 4 and 5.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.

REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

Monday, December 10 – Wednesday, December 12

To what degree does public opinion influence policy outcomes?

Sunday, December 16: Final exam (7:30 p.m. - 10 p.m.)