

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

PSCI 3051.001
FALL 2005
T TH 3:30-4:45 P.M.
N1B23 RAMALEY

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HOURS: W 9 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.

Specifically, the course is structured around four key themes:

- How we measure public opinion, particularly the methodology of public opinion polling.
- How the public forms opinions about politics – what people know about politics, how they organize their beliefs, and why it matters.
- What factors in the political world influence and shape public opinion, including the effects of the media, political rhetoric, and social forces.
- The consequences of public opinion – for citizen participation in politics, for the actions of political leaders, and for representation more generally.

WEBCT IS YOUR FRIEND

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

OBJECTIVES

At its core, this class is about encouraging you to think about public opinion in an analytical way. This will include reading about the public opinion questions that other researchers have considered, and using these to develop theoretical questions that interest you. In particular, a major component of the class will involve reading published research on public opinion and its character, and then critiquing the arguments raised in these scholarly works. These assignments are intended to encourage both analytical thinking as well as critical writing, while also highlighting the questions and approaches used in research on political behavior.

EXPECTATIONS

The class will primarily be lecture format, but you are encouraged to raise questions at any point in the lecture, including matters of clarification, theoretical points, or topics to address in class discussion.

The reading assignments are a core part of the class – to build a working knowledge of the character of public opinion, and also to encourage you to ask questions, develop theories, and think about explanations for political phenomena. Keeping up with assigned readings is important. You are expected to complete readings listed for a given day **before** the scheduled class meeting.

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.

READING MATERIAL

- Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 6th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2005. *American Public Opinion: Its Origin, Contents, and Impact*. 7th edition. New York: Longman.
- A set of supplementary book chapters and articles. These are available either as online journals or on the library's e-reserves at libraries.colorado.edu/screens/course reserves.html

REQUIREMENTS

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

three critical analysis response papers (each worth 10% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will be asked to choose four topics that interest you from a list of supplemental readings. These topics (such as how people use morals and values in politics, media effects, and the voting habits of young people) reflect material covered in class, but in closer detail. For each topic, you will read two 'bonus' book chapters or short articles, and then respond to what you read in a two to three page essay. Of the four papers, the three best scores will count toward your final grade. Papers should not be simply summaries of the readings, but should instead analyze and discuss more critically the issues at hand. Additional guidelines are detailed in a separate handout. Late papers are not accepted.

short assignments (worth 10% of your final grade)

This includes quizzes on the readings, in-class short assignments, participation in class discussions, and small homework projects. Make-up assignments are not given.

three exams (each worth 20% of your final grade)

SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS

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 www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

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 www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism, citation style, and writing in political science is also posted under *Links* on WebCT. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court 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).

CLASS SCHEDULE: FALL 2005

PSCI 3051 – PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

TU: August 23 First class

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

TH: August 25 Why study public opinion; Measuring public opinion
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 1
Asher: Chapter 1

TU: August 30 Questionnaire wording and design
Asher: Chapters 2-3

TH: September 1 *Class does not meet.*

TU: September 6 Questionnaire construction

TH: September 8 Sampling
Asher: Chapters 4-5

TU: September 13 Interviewer effects, Alternatives to polls
Asher: Chapters 6-8

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC OPINION

TH: September 15 Information
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 3

TU: September 20 Values, ideology, and partisanship

TH: September 22 Opinion formation

TU: September 27 Sophistication and cognition
Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20:109-130.

TH: September 29 **Exam 1**

INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

TU: October 4 Socialization and personal experience
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 5

TH: October 6 Self interest and symbolic politics

- TU: October 11 The mass media
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 8
- TH: October 13 *Fall break. Class does not meet.*
- TU: October 18 The mass media
- TH: October 20 Social influences
 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)
- TU: October 25 Social influences
 Beck, Paul Allen, Russell J. Dalton, Steven Greene, and Robert Huckfeldt. 2002. "The Social Calculus of Voting: Interpersonal, Media, and Organizational Influences on Presidential Choices." *American Political Science Review* 96:57-73.
- TH: October 27 Campaigns and elections
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 9
 Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4 (p. 96-136).
- TU: November 1 Political leaders
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 10
- TH: November 3 **Exam 2**

EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

- TU: November 8 Opinion dynamics and opinions in the aggregate
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 4
- TH: November 10 Democratic values and tolerance
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 6
 Inglehart, Ronald. 2003. "How Solid is Mass Support for Democracy – And How Can We Measure It?" *PS* 36:51-57.
- TU: November 15 Institutional support
 Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1996. *Congress As Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5 (p. 84-105) & chapter 8 (p. 145-162).
- TH: November 17 Trust in government
 Mutz, Diana C., and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99:1-15.

CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

- TU: November 22 Political participation and voter turnout
- TH: November 24 *Thanksgiving break. Class does not meet.*
- TU: November 29 Political participation – social capital
Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.
Fiorina, Morris P. 1999. "Extreme Voices: A Dark Side of Civic Engagement." In Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. Chapter 11 (p. 395-425).
- TH: December 1 Political participation – who participates
Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 1999. "Civic Participation and the Equality Problem." In Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. Chapter 12 (p. 427-459).
- TU: December 6 Representation and responsiveness
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 11
- TH: December 8 Last day of class
- TU: December 13 **Final exam.** (7:30 a.m. - 10 a.m.)