

PUBLIC OPINION & POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

PSCI 3051: SECTION 001
SPRING 2005
T TH 9:30-10:45 A.M.
234 KETCHUM

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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.
- what the consequences of public opinion are – 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. Copies of Powerpoint slides from lectures will be posted after each class meeting as long as sufficient numbers are attending class. If attendance drops, this practice will stop.

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. Quizzes over class readings are possible.

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.
- Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- A set of supplementary book chapters and articles. These are available 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 three 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. 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.

longer paper (worth 20% of your final grade)

In addition to the response papers, you will produce a longer five to seven page paper that delves into one aspect of political behavior research in greater detail. Paper topics, guidelines, and additional details will be forthcoming later in the semester.

midterm exam (worth 25% of your final grade)

final exam (worth 25% 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.
- 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: SPRING 2005

PSCI 3051 – PUBLIC OPINION & POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

TU: January 11 First class

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

TH: January 13 Why study public opinion; Measuring public opinion
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 1
Asher: Chapter 1

TU: January 18 Questionnaire wording and design
Asher: Chapters 2-3

TH: January 20 Questionnaire construction

TU: January 25 Sampling
Asher: Chapters 4-5

TH: January 27 Interviewer effects, Alternatives to polls
Asher: Chapters 6-8

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC OPINION

TU: February 1 Information
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 3

TH: February 3 Values, ideology, and partisanship

TU: February 8 Opinion formation

TH: February 10 Sophistication and cognition

INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

TU: February 15 Socialization and personal experience
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 5

TH: February 17 Self interest and symbolic politics

TU: February 22 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)

TH: February 24 Catch-up and review for the midterm

TU: March 1 **Midterm exam**

- TH: March 3 The mass media
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 8
- TU: March 8 The mass media
- TH: March 10 Campaigns and elections
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 9
Stimson: Chapter 4
- TU: March 15 Political leaders
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 10

EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

- TH: March 17 Opinion dynamics and opinions in the aggregate
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 4
Stimson: Chapter 1-2
- TU: March 22 No class – Spring break
- TH: March 24 No class – Spring break
- TU: March 29 Issues
Stimson: Chapter 3
- TH: March 31 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: April 5 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: April 7 Class will not meet.
- TU: April 12 Trust in government
Stimson: Chapter 5

CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

- TH: April 14 Political participation and voter turnout
- TU: April 19 Political participation – social capital
Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v006/6.1putnam.html
(Also listed under *Links* on WebCT)

- TH: April 21 **Longer paper due.**
Political participation – who participates
Brady, Henry E., Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Laurel Elms. 2002.
“Who Bowls? The (Un)Changing Stratification of Participation.” In Barbara Norrander
and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Understanding Public Opinion*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.:
CQ Press.
- TU: April 26 Representation and responsiveness
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 11
Stimson: Chapter 6
- TH: April 28 Last day of class
- TU: May 3 **Final exam.** (10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.)