

public opinion & political behavior

PSCI 3051.001
SPRING 2007
M W F 9-9:50 A.M.
E417 MUENZINGER

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HOURS: W 1 P.M – 3 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.

CULEARN IS YOUR FRIEND

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at culearn.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 be to acquire some of the skills necessary to analyze public opinion data and explore theories of public opinion. To build these skills, we will study the methodology of public opinion and work hands-on with survey data.

EXPECTATIONS

You are encouraged to be an active participant in class. Please feel free to raise questions at any point during lectures, 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.

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 should 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. 2007. *American Public Opinion: Its Origin, Contents, and Impact*. Updated 7th edition. New York: Longman.
- A set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be linked to from CULearn.
 - Some are accessible on JSTOR, an archive of social science journals: www.jstor.org
 - Some are available in the library's e-reserves: libraries.colorado.edu/screens/course reserves.html
 - Some are articles from journals available online through the library's e-journal archives.
 - *Note:* In some cases, you may be blocked from accessing online journals from off-campus computers. See information on the website of the University Library for instructions on remote access from off-site: ucblibraries.colorado.edu/research/remote.htm

REQUIREMENTS

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

participation, quizzes, and homework assignments (worth 25% of your final grade)

This includes quizzes on the readings, in-class assignments, participation in class discussions, and homework projects on the skills associated with analyzing public opinion data.

research paper (worth 30% of your final grade)

As demonstration of the vast analytical skills gained in this class, you will prepare a ten to fifteen page research paper concerning some exciting question about public opinion (of your own choosing, given instructor approval). The paper will give you the opportunity to use survey data to explore said question, and explore a particular aspect of public opinion in greater detail.

three exams (each worth 15% 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 on CULearn. 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).

INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

- M: February 19 Socialization and personal experience
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 5.
- W: February 21 Self interest and symbolic politics
- F: February 23 Survey analysis: Writing hypotheses
- M: February 26 The mass media
Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 2000. *Everything You Think You Know About Politics...And Why You're Wrong*. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 24 (p. 187-195).
- W: February 28 The mass media
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 8.
- F: March 2 Survey analysis: Looking at survey responses
- M: March 5 Social influences
Fishkin, James S. 1999. "Toward Deliberative Democracy: Experimenting with an Ideal." In Stephen L. Elkin and Karol Edward Soltan, eds., *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press.
- W: March 7 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.
- F: March 9 Survey analysis: Analyzing survey data
- M: March 12 Campaigns
Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4 (p. 96-136).
- W: March 14 Elections
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 9.
- F: March 16 Survey analysis: Crosstab analysis
- M: March 19 Political leaders
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 10.
- W: March 21 Catch-up and review
- F: March 23 **Exam 2**
- M: March 26 *Spring break. Class does not meet.*
- W: March 28 *Spring break. Class does not meet.*
- F: March 30 *Spring break. Class does not meet.*

EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

- M: April 2 Opinion dynamics and change over time
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 4.
- W: April 4 Presidential approval
- F: April 6 Survey analysis: Control tables
- M: April 9 Public preferences about policy issues
 Brewer, Mark D., and Jeffrey M. Stonecash. 2007. *Split: Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 1 (p. 1-22).
- W: April 11 Survey analysis: Writing a research paper
- F: April 13 *Class does not meet.*
- M: April 16 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.
- W: April 18 Opinions about government
 Hibbing, John R. 2002. "The People's Craving for Unselfish Government." In Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Understanding Public Opinion*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- F: April 20 Trust in government

CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

- M: April 23 Voter turnout
- W: April 25 Political participation
- F: April 27 Explaining differences in political participation
 Andolina, Molly W., Krista Jenkins, Cliff Zukin, and Scott Keeter. 2003. "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36(2):275-280.
- M: April 30 Social capital
 Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.
- W: May 2 Representation and responsiveness
 Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 11.
- F: May 4 Last day of class
- T: May 8 **Final exam**, 7:30-10:00 a.m.