
public opinion & political participation

**POLI 70: SECTION 002
SPRING 2003**

**M W F 10-10:50 A.M.
009 MITCHELL**

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.
- how the public forms opinions about politics – what they know about politics, how they organize their beliefs, and why it matters.
- what factors in the political world influence and shape public opinion.
- what the consequences of public opinion are – for citizen participation in politics, for the actions of political leaders, and for representation more generally.

HOW TO CONTACT ME

by e-mail: e-mail is a fine way to contact me: wolak@email.unc.edu

office hours:

My office hours are held in 300 Hamilton Hall on **Mondays and Wednesdays 11 a.m. to noon**, and **Tuesdays 10 a.m. to noon**. If these office hours conflict with your schedule, I am happy to set up other meeting times.

BLACKBOARD IS YOUR FRIEND

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

OBJECTIVES

At its core, this class is about encouraging you to think about public opinion in an analytical way. In part, this will involve reading about the public opinion questions that other researchers have considered, using these to jump off from in developing theoretical questions that interest you. A second part will be gaining some of the skills necessary to analyze public opinion data and explore theories of public opinion. To build these skills, we will usually spend Fridays on the methodology of public opinion, working hands-on with survey data and statistical analysis software.

READING MATERIAL

The readings 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, and you should generally aim to complete the readings listed for a given day before the scheduled class meeting.

required texts

- Asher, Herbert. 2001. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 5th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Erikson, Robert A., and Kent Tedin. 2003. *American Public Opinion: Its Origin, Contents, and Impact*. 6th edition. New York: Longman.

- A set of supplementary book chapters and articles.

These are available on the library's e-reserves at eres.lib.unc.edu You can also make photocopies of the chapters at the Reserves Section of the Undergraduate Library. Links to these readings online will be posted on Blackboard under *External Links*.

optional

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, Richard A. Joslyn, and H.T. Reynolds. 2001. *Political Science Research Methods*. 4th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

This book is a highly useful one that is nice to have in your library, particularly if you will be taking more upper level political science courses. We will focus on a smaller subset of chapters from the book, which will be on e-reserves for those who choose not to purchase the text.

REQUIREMENTS

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

assignments (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

This includes some writing exercises in preparation for the research paper assignment, homeworks on analyzing public opinion data, and the occasional short paper or essay.

research paper and presentation (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

As demonstration of the vast analytical skills gained in this class, you will prepare a ten 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 you will also have a chance to show off your research in a short in-class presentation near the end of the semester.

midterm exam (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

final exam (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

One nifty project for the class is to participate as interviewers in the Carolina Poll, a regional public opinion survey conducted by UNC's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The poll will involve one full evening sometime in March or April. The interviewing session will last four hours, and you will be given a choice of nights during one week to participate. In return for participating in the survey, the class will be allowed to ask three questions on the survey, which can serve as potential fodder for research papers and other class projects.

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 Student Judicial System website (www.unc.edu/depts/honor/).
- 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

POLI 70 public opinion & political participation Spring 2003

W: January 8 First class

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

F: January 10 Why study public opinion; Measuring public opinion
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 1
Asher: Chapter 1

M: January 13 Questionnaire wording and design
Asher: Chapters 2-3

W: January 15 Questionnaire construction

F: January 17 Sampling
M: using Stata
Asher: Chapter 4

M: January 20 No class – Martin Luther King Day

W: January 22 Interviewer effects
Asher: Chapters 5-6

F: January 24 **M:** the process of data analysis and writing hypotheses
Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds: Chapter 3

M: January 27 Alternatives to polls
Asher: Chapter 8

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC OPINION

W: January 29 Information
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 3 (p. 51-81)

F: January 31 Values and ideology
Jacoby, William G. 2002. "Core Values and Political Attitudes." In Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Understanding Public Opinion*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. (p. 177-201)

M: February 3 Partisanship

W: February 5 Opinion formation
Feldman, Stanley. 1995. "Answering Survey Questions: The Measurement and Meaning of Public Opinion." In Milton Lodge and Kathleen M. McGraw, eds., *Political Judgment: Structure and Process*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

F: February 7 **M:** single variable descriptives – mean, median, mode
Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds: Chapter 4

M: February 10 Sophistication and cognition

INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

- W: February 12 Socialization and personal experience
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 5 (p. 112-141)
- F: February 14 **M:** frequency tables
Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds: Chapter 11
- M: February 17 The mass media
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 8 (p. 208-236)
- W: February 19 Campaigns and elections
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 9 (p. 237-263)
- F: February 21 **M:** two-variable tables
Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds: Chapter 12
- M: February 24 Political leaders
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 10 (p. 264-289)
- W: February 26 How social is opinion formation?
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)
- F: February 28 Catch-up and review
- M: March 3 **Midterm exam**

EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

- W: March 5 Issues, micro level
- F: March 7 **M:** measures of association
- M: March 10 Spring break
- W: March 12 Spring break
- F: March 14 Spring break
- M: March 17 Issues, macro level
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 4 (p. 82-111)
- W: March 19 Issues, macro level
- F: March 21 **M:** control tables
Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds: Chapter 13 (p.393-401)
- M: March 24 Democratic values and tolerance
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 6 (p. 142-169)
- W: March 26 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).
- F: March 28 Trust in government

CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

- M: March 31 Political participation – turnout
- W: April 2 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
- F: April 4 No class – work on papers and presentations
- M: April 7 Political participation – who participates
- W: April 9 Representation and responsiveness
Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 12 (p. 313-324)
- F: April 11 Representation and responsiveness
- M: April 14 Presentations
- W: April 16 Presentations
- F: April 18 Easter holiday – no class
- M: April 21 Presentations
- W: April 23 Presentations. Research papers due.
- F: April 25 Last day of class.
- M: April 28 **Final exam**, 9 a.m.