This course concerns the joy and magic that is the study of political behavior and 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 start by briefly considering the measurement of public opinion. Next, we will explore the roots of public preferences and how people form opinions. We will then consider the expression of public opinion, the causes and consequences of public sentiments such as presidential approval, trust in government, and tolerance. Next, we will consider the factors within one’s political environment that influence and shape public opinion, including the effects of social pressures, the news media, and campaigns. Finally, we will consider the expression of public opinion – in vote choice, political participation, and patterns of representation.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS**

Most of the course readings include book chapters and journal articles, available on e-reserves or online journals. Three books have also been assigned and are available at the University Bookstore.


For those who need additional background reading, a good undergraduate public opinion textbook is:


**REQUIREMENTS**

**PARTICIPATION** (worth 20% of your final grade)

It is essential that you not only attend class, but also actively engage in class discussions. For two of the weeks, you will also be responsible for leading class discussion.

**SIX SHORT PAPERS** (each worth 5% of your final grade)

Throughout the course, you will be responsible for six short papers in response to a week’s readings. These response papers should be two to three pages in length, and turned in before we discuss that week’s set of readings. Papers should not be summaries of the readings, but instead add some novel insights to the points raised in the readings. For instance, you might critique the theory or methods of the research, discussing the implications of these limitations for the authors’ findings. You might extend points raised in...
the readings, suggesting questions we might ask if we pushed these arguments further. You might also
synthesize readings on a topic with other theories covered in this class or other courses. Or you could
discuss points of conflict between the readings, and discuss how to resolve these disagreements.

ASSIGNMENTS RELATED TO RESEARCH PAPER (worth 10% of your final grade)
Part of the course will be devoted to developing the methodological skills necessarily to conduct basic
analysis of survey data. We will spend time at the beginning of the semester exploring the different kinds
of survey data that are available as well as the tools you will need to analyze this data. Throughout the
semester, there will be a variety of short assignments related to the development of your research paper.
In the beginning of the semester, you will be responsible for some homework assignments related to basic
survey analysis. Later in the semester, you will turn in memos describing your research question,
hypotheses, and literature review.

RESEARCH PAPER (worth 40% of your final grade)
The final project for this class will be to develop a research paper that tests an interesting question about
public opinion or political behavior. This paper will resemble the format of the kinds of academic papers
read in class – including development of a research question, a review of relevant literature, theory, tests of
these explanations, and interpretation of what you find. The paper should be 15-25 pages in length.
Additional guidelines will be detailed in a separate handout.

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 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. 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

OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD

1. INTRODUCTION TO SURVEYS
   Working with survey data. Hypothesis testing.
   Monday, August 28.

   Monday, September 4   Class does not meet – Labor Day.

2. ABOUT POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
   Overview of the field. Measuring public opinion.
   Monday, September 11

   Other resources:

THE INGREDIENTS OF PUBLIC OPINION

3. THE ROOTS OF OPINIONS
   Monday, September 18
Other resources:

4. Partisanship and ideology


Monday, September 25

Other resources:

5. Political decision-making


Monday, October 2
6. Collective opinion and macro politics

Opinion dynamics at the macro level. Presidental approval. Economy.

Monday, October 9


Other resources:


7. Trust in government


Monday, October 16


Other resources:

8. TOLERANCE AND ATTITUDES ABOUT RACE

*Democratic norms and values. Tolerance and intolerance. Race.*

**Monday, October 23**


Other resources:
INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

9. Social influences

Deliberation. Interpersonal communication. Social networks and their consequences.

Monday, October 30


Other resources


10. Media effects

Priming. Framing. Agenda-setting. Learning from the news media.

Monday, November 6


Other sources:

I I. Campaigns

How and when campaigns influence voters. Negative advertising.

Monday, November 13


Other sources:


Monday, November 20: Fall break. Class does not meet.

Consequences of public opinion

I 2. Vote choice

Models of voter decision-making. Spatial and directional models.

Monday, November 27

Other resources:

### 3. Political Participation

Voter turnout. Social capital.

**Monday, December 4**

Other resources:

### 4. Representation

Macro polity.

**Monday, December 11**

Other resources:

**Friday, December 15** Turn in research paper by noon.