

public opinion & political behavior

PLS 333.001
SPRING 2022
OLDS HALL 11
MW 12:40 – 2:00 P.M.

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OFFICE HOURS: M & W, 2-3 P.M.
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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. We will begin by thinking about how the public forms opinions about politics – what people know about politics, how they organize their beliefs, and why it matters. We will then investigate the factors in the political world influence and shape public opinion, including self-interest, political rhetoric, and social forces. Finally, we will explore the consequences of public opinion – for citizen participation in politics, for the actions of political leaders, and for representation.

D2L is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at d2l.msu.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, the readings include a set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the course website.

expectations

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

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, not distracting others in class, silencing cell phones, and not disrupting the class if arriving late.

being flexible

It's a challenging time. I understand. The assignments for this course have been designed to allow for some flexibility in case you or others important to you become ill or things otherwise go awry in your life. Please keep in touch through the semester if you need additional help or accommodations.

requirements

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

PARTICIPATION, SHORT ASSIGNMENTS, AND QUIZZES *(worth 20% of your final grade)*

Throughout the semester, you can accumulate points toward this portion of your grade through attending class lectures, participating in in-class activities, taking some short quizzes, and completing homework assignments. Links to quizzes and homework assignments will be posted on D2L. Details about how your participation/homework grades are calculated are described in greater detail on D2L.

TWO PAPERS *(each worth 20% of your final grade)*

You will be asked to write two essays this semester, around 1500 words each (5-6 pages double-spaced). Three paper assignments will be given over the course of the semester, and you can choose which two topics you would like to write about among the three options. Paper guidelines will be detailed in separate handouts.

TWO EXAMS *(each worth 20% of your final grade)*

There will be a midterm exam and a final exam.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please let me know in a timely manner so that your needs may be met. You can contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities for more information at www.rcpd.msu.edu.

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 refer to ombud.msu.edu/resources-self-help/academic-integrity. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and possible 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).

schedule of readings and topics

WHY STUDY PUBLIC OPINION?

Monday, January 10 – Wednesday, January 12

Introduction to the class and the study of public opinion.

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

Wednesday, January 19

Why we rely on polling to understand public opinion, the challenges of knowing public opinion.

- Hillygus, Sunshine D. 2016. "The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

CIVIC COMPETENCE

Monday, January 24 – Wednesday, January 26

The role of citizens in a democracy. How much do people know about politics?

- Berelson, Bernard. 1952. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:313-330.
- Bennett, Stephen E. 1988. "'Know-Nothings' Revisited: The Meaning of Political Ignorance Today." *Social Science Quarterly* 69(2): 476-490.

WHAT PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT POLITICS

Monday, January 31 – Wednesday, February 2

Do citizens learn what they need to know? Why people believe conspiracy theories..

- Lupia, Arthur. 2006. "How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence." *Critical Review* 18: 217-232.
- Enders, Adam M. and Joseph E. Uscinski. 2021. "Conspiracy Theories and Political Identities." In David Barker and Elizabeth Suhay, eds. *The Politics of Truth in Polarized America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

HOW PEOPLE ORGANIZE THEIR BELIEFS

Monday, February 7 – Wednesday, February 9

Ideology. How organized and coherent are people's beliefs?

- Kinder, Donald R., and Nathan P. Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal Nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-2.

PARTISANSHIP

Monday, February 14 – Wednesday, February 16

Party identification's role in politics, party polarization in the electorate

- Hetherington, Marc. 2016. "Partisanship and Polarization in Contemporary Politics." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

- Klar, Samara, and Yanna Krupnikov. 2016. *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.

WHERE DO ATTITUDES COME FROM?

Monday, February 21 – Wednesday, February 23

The origins of political beliefs. How personality and socialization shape political perspectives.

- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71:782-799.
- Hetherington, Marc. 2019. "Worldview Politics." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.

GROUP INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION

Monday, February 28

The role of race and gender in public opinion

- Burns, Nancy, and Donald Kinder. 2012. "Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Wednesday, March 2: Midterm exam

Monday, March 7 – Wednesday, March 9: Spring break – class does not meet.

SELF-INTEREST AND SOCIAL MOTIVES

Monday, March 14 – Wednesday, March 16

The influence of social groups, and the role of self-interest

- Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106(3):517-532.
- White, Ismail K., Chryl Laird, and Troy Allen. 2014. "Selling Out?: The Politics of Navigating Conflicts Between Racial Group Interest and Self-Interest." *American Political Science Review* 108(4):783-800.

POLITICIANS' INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION

Monday, March 21 – Wednesday, March 23

The effects of campaigns on public preference. Politicians' attempts to persuade.

- Sides, John, and Jake Haselswerdt. 2016. "Campaigns and Elections." In Adam J. Berinsky, ed., *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Daniel M., and Hans J.G. Hassell. 2018. "On the Limits of Officials' Ability to Change Citizens' Priorities: A Field Experiment in Local Politics." *American Political Science Review* 112(4): 860–873.

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS FROM GOVERNMENT

Monday, March 28 – Wednesday, March 30

Public opinion in the aggregate. How people want government to work.

- Stimson, James A. 2015. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.

- Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 5.

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Monday, April 4 – Wednesday, April 6

Why do people try to limit the rights of others? The virtues of talking with people who disagree with you.

- Carey, John M., Gretchen Helmke, Brendan Nyhan, Mitchell Sanders, and Susan Stokes. 2019. "Searching for Bright Lines in the Trump Presidency." *Perspectives on Politics* 17(3): 699-718.
- Gibson, James L. 2008. "Intolerance and Political Repression in the United States: A Half Century after McCarthyism." *American Journal of Political Science* 52:96-108.

ENGAGING IN POLITICS FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY

Monday, April 11 – Wednesday, April 13

Why do people participate in politics? And why do some avoid politics?

- Mutz, Diana C. 2002. "Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice." *American Political Science Review* 96:111-126.
- Lewis-Beck, Michael S., William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 5.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Monday, April 18 – Wednesday, April 20

Explaining participation in politics and in civic life.

- Bergan, Daniel E., Dustin Carnahan, Nazita Lajevardi, Mel Medeiros, Sarah Reckhow, and Kjerstin Thorson. 2021. "Promoting the Youth Vote: The Role of Informational Cues and Social Pressure." *Political Behavior*.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:65-78.

REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIVENESS

Monday, April 25 – Wednesday, April 27

Do all have equal voice in politics? Does public opinion influence policy outcomes?

- Leighley, Jan E., and Jennifer Oser. 2018. "Representation in an Era of Political and Economic Inequality: How and When Citizen Engagement Matters." *Perspectives on Politics* 16(2):328-344.
- Butler, Daniel, and David Nickerson. 2011. "Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6(1):55-83.

Monday, May 2: Final exam (12:45 – 2:45 p.m.)