

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO, SPRING 2018

Professor David Doherty | ddoherty@luc.edu | Coffey Hall, 318 (3rd Floor) | Phone: 773-508-3063

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:30-3:00pm and Thursdays from 11:30am-1:00pm

This course is designed to introduce you to the field of public opinion research. In the first several weeks of the course we will focus on how public opinion surveys are conducted with an eye toward assessing the strengths and limitations of these methods. During the remainder of the course will cover a range of research that uses public opinion data to answer questions about the nature, origins, and consequences of public opinion.

When you complete this course successfully, you will...

- ...understand the key strengths and weaknesses of public opinion surveys and be able to critically evaluate survey-based claims about what policies and practices the American public supports.
- ...have a better understanding of how public opinion scholars use survey data and statistical tools to answer questions about the nature of public opinion.
- ...be familiar with some of the evidence scholars have gathered regarding the causes and consequences of American citizens' political attitudes.
- ...have developed a greater capacity to think critically about the appropriate role of public opinion in American democracy.

1 Course Requirements

READING. Readings will be drawn primarily from two books: *Understanding Public Opinion* (3rd Edition; referred to as **UPO** in the reading assignments) and *New Directions in Public Opinion* (2nd Edition; **ND** in the reading assignments). Both books are available in the bookstore and through online retailers. Please get the correct edition of each book. The remaining readings for the course are available online. You can find them under the “Resources” section of the Sakai course site (<http://sakai.luc.edu/>).

QUIZZES. At the beginning of most class sessions we will have brief quizzes. These quizzes will consist of a small number of multiple choice (or very short answer) questions that focus on basic, core ideas from the assigned reading for the day. You will automatically receive 60% for being in class to complete the quiz. These quizzes serve as an incentive for you to keep up with the readings and be prepared for class meetings. A few other important points regarding these quizzes:

1. they will occur at the beginning of class—you must be on time as *you can not make up these quizzes*;
2. I understand that occasionally “something comes up” that leads students to miss a day of class or be unable to complete the reading prior to class. I account for this when calculating your grade for this portion of the course: *I will drop your lowest score and average only the remaining scores.*

EXAMS. We will have an in-class midterm exam consisting of multiple choice and short essay questions on Thursday, March 1. The final exam will take place on Tuesday, May 1 at 1:00pm. This exam will be cumulative, but greater weight will be given to the material we cover after the midterm. The exam will include multiple choice questions as well as several essay questions.

SHORT PAPERS. There are three short (2-3 pages) writing assignments for the class. For the first you will find three questions fielded in national surveys around the same time (no more than a year or so apart). The questions should each ask respondents about the *same policy matter* but at least one should yield a pattern of response that *seems at odds with the others* (i.e., suggests a different conclusions about how supportive the public is of the policy in question). You will draw on material from the first section of the course to discuss why these difference may exist.

- Do the differences suggest that people don't have meaningful attitudes on this topic? Might question wording have affected patterns of response? Question ordering?
- If an elected official wanted to respond to what the public wants, what should she make of the survey findings? Would it help to field another survey to measure attitudes about the issue in a different way? How so?

Your paper should include a nicely formatted appendix (not counted toward the length of the paper) with full details about the questions you are using: question wording, response options provided, percent of respondents giving each response, and information about how the surveys were conducted.

You should bring an outline or draft of your paper, as well as three copies of your Appendix to class on Thursday, February 1. A final version of the paper is due at the start of class on Thursday, February 8.

The remaining two short writing assignments will be based on readings from two of the days in weeks 4-15 where the reading includes empirical analysis (these days are marked with an asterisk [*] in the reading list). These papers involve three core tasks: 1) clearly and effectively summarizing the reading for the day, 2) effectively describing and interpreting the evidence presented, and 3) thoughtfully reflecting on the reading.

Thus, these papers should follow this structure:

- Describe the question the author is trying to answer and why answering the question is important (in other words, why should we care about the answer to the question?)
- Describe the evidence the author presents. Focus on two tables or figures presented in the reading that you think are most important to the author's argument. Clearly interpret what these tables and/or figures mean and why they were presented. How do they help us answer the author's question? What conclusions does the author reach about his or her question?
- Reflect on the reading. This reflection may include: 1) making connections between the reading and other readings or class discussions from the course, 2) identifying weaknesses in the author's evidence or additional evidence that might shed more light on the author's question or 3) a discussion of what the reading says about "big" questions about the nature of public opinion, public competence, the appropriate role of public opinion in democracy, etc.

ANALYSIS PAPER. You will also write a 5-7 page paper. In the paper you will examine public attitudes about a topic of your choosing. You will develop expectations (hypotheses) regarding what factors may affect people's attitudes about the topic. You will then use either iPoll or the SDA system (both will be demonstrated in class) to examine whether you expectations (hypotheses) are supported by public opinion data. More details on this assignment will be provided later in the semester. The paper is due in class Thursday, April 12.

SUBMIT ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS VIA THE ASSIGNMENTS PAGE ON SAKAI. After I grade the assignment (digitally) you will see it attached under "Assignments" on Sakai with ".DD" added to the file name. This attached document will include comments and edits. Note that all papers will be automatically submitted to Turnitin.com (see *Academic Dishonesty* section below).

2 Grading Policy

GRADING RUBRIC AND SCALE:

Components of Your Course Grade	Letter Grade Ranges
Quizzes: 15%	A = 93.00% or higher C+ = 77.00 - 79.99%
Short Papers x 3: 5%/each	A- = 90.00 - 92.99% C = 73.00 - 76.99%
Analysis Paper: 15%	B+ = 87.00 - 89.99% C- = 70.00 - 72.99%
Midterm: 20%	B = 83.00 - 86.99% D+ = 67.00 - 69.99%
Final Exam: 35%	B- = 80.00 - 82.99% D = 60.00 - 66.99%

The scoring rubric above and the thresholds for various letter grades are non-negotiable. I will not change your numeric grade to “bump you up” to the next letter grade. For example, if your final score in the class is 86.8, your letter grade for the class will be a B, not a B+ just because you are *so close*.

IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION OR CONCERN ABOUT YOUR GRADE ON AN ASSIGNMENT OR EXAM you must contact me within 7 days of receiving the grade. For example, if an exam is returned to you at the end of a Monday class, you have until the end of the following Monday class to contact me.

MISSED CLASSES/LATE ASSIGNMENTS: The only excusable reasons for missing a class or exam or handing in an assignment late are serious illnesses and family emergencies. In either case you must both 1) notify me of your situation in a timely manner and 2) provide appropriate documentation.¹ I do not have a hard and fast policy about what constitutes a “timely manner.” However, given the wide availability of internet access, in virtually all cases I expect you to contact me *before* the absence or missed assignment.

Papers handed in late without documentation will be penalized by 10 points (out of 100) for each day they are late. Thus, if you hand in your paper one day late, the highest grade you can receive is a 90.

OFFICE HOURS/GETTING HELP: My regularly scheduled office hours are Tuesdays from 1:30-3:00pm and Thursdays from 11:30am-1:00pm. If you need to schedule another meeting time, email me.

3 Additional Policies and Notes

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: I do not permit the use of laptops or other technology during class. If you would like to read a brief summary of research that shows that laptops interfere with in-class learning, this is a good place to start: <http://web.stanford.edu/class/linguist156/laptops.pdf>.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY will not be tolerated. Incidents of plagiarism or cheating on an exam will result in a grade of F (zero) on the assignment or exam in question. The behavior will be reported to the chair of your major department and to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. When you submit your papers via Sakai they will automatically be checked for plagiarism by Turnitin.com. This service compares your paper with materials available through the internet, published work, and papers submitted by other students (from Loyola and elsewhere).

¹This extends to situations where there is a death in the family. If you prefer, you can provide documentation to your academic advisor and ask them to let me know that documentation has been provided.

4 Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

- UPO = Understanding Public Opinion
ND = New Directions in Public Opinion
* = Empirical reading (see SHORT PAPERS above)

Measuring Public Opinion

WEEK 1: JANUARY 15 - JANUARY 19: Introduction to Public Opinion

Tuesday *No reading assignment*

Thursday Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 5)
UPO: The Diverse Paths to Understanding Public Opinion (Introduction - Norrander & Wilcox)

WEEK 2: JANUARY 22 - JANUARY 26: Defining and Measuring Public Opinion

Tuesday ND: The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges (Chapter 2 - Hillygus)
UPO: Appendix: A Primer on Statistics and Public Opinion

Thursday Asher, Herbert. 2011. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know, 8th Edition*. CQ Press. Chapter 3.

WEEK 3: JANUARY 29 - FEBRUARY 2: Question Wording, Non-Attitudes, and Other Complications

Tuesday Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." In Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith (eds.), *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings (6th Edition)*. New York: Sage Press.

Thursday Do Republicans Want to Postpone the 2020 Election? - The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/amp/article/536472/>
Draft of Question Comparison Assignment Due

Is the Public Competent?

WEEK 4: FEBRUARY 5 - FEBRUARY 9: Are People's Attitudes Organized?

Tuesday * Converse, Philip E. 2006 (1964). "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Critical Review* 18: 1-74. (read pages 18-34; 42-47; READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)

Thursday Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20: 109-130. (READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)
Short Paper on Polling Due

WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 12 - FEBRUARY 16: Redeeming the Public?

Tuesday * Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88: 63-76. (READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)

Thursday ND: Two-thirds full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance (Chapter 3 - Gilens)

Where Do Attitudes Come From?

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 19 - FEBRUARY 23: Social Forces, Self-Interest I

Tuesday * Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71: 782-799. (READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)

Thursday * Green, Donald P. and Ann Elizabeth Gerken. 1989. "Self-Interest and Public Opinion Toward Smoking Restrictions and Cigarette Taxes." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53: 1-16.

WEEK 7: FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 2: Self-Interest II

Tuesday Miller, Dale T. 1999. "The Norm of Self-Interest." *American Psychologist* 54: 1053-1060.

Thursday **MIDTERM EXAM**

WEEK 8: MARCH 5 - MARCH 9: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9: MARCH 12 - MARCH 16: Psychological Factors

Tuesday * ND: Personality and Public Opinion (Chapter 8 - Mondak & Hibbing)

Thursday UPO: The Ultimate Source of Political Opinions (Chapter 3 - Hibbing & Alford)

WEEK 10: MARCH 19 - MARCH 23: The Role of Groups

Wednesday * Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion (PDF on Sakai; Burns & Kinder)

Friday * ND: A Jump to the Right, A Step to the Left: Religion and Public Opinion (Chapter 11 - Campbell, Layman, & Green)

WEEK 11: MARCH 26 - MARCH 30: Partisanship I

Tuesday * Green, Donald P., Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schikler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven: Yale University Press (Chapter 2).

Thursday * Theodoridis, Alexander G. Forthcoming. "Me, Myself, and (I), (D), or (R)? Partisanship and Political Cognition through the Lens of Implicit Identity." *Journal of Politics*. (READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)

WEEK 12: APRIL 2 - APRIL 6: Partisanship II

Tuesday ND: Partisanship and Polarization (Chapter 7 - Hetherington)

Thursday * Nicholson, Stephen P. 2012. "Polarizing Cues." *American Journal of Political Science* 56: 52-66. (READING GUIDE ON SAKAI)

Public Opinion in Action

WEEK 13: APRIL 9 - APRIL 13: Attitudes about Policy

Tuesday * UPO: Public Opinion and the Iraq War (Chapter 4 - Berinsky)

Thursday * UPO: The Puzzling Case of Abortion Attitudes in the Millennial Generation (Chapter 7 - Wilcox & Carr)
Analysis Paper Due

WEEK 14: APRIL 16 - APRIL 20: Attitudes about Policy and the Government

Tuesday * UPO: Race and the Formation of Attitudes: Responses to Hurricane Katrina (Chapter 6 - Atkeson & Maestas)

Thursday * Mutz, Diana C., and Gregory Flemming. 1999. "How Good People Make Bad Collectives: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Public Attitudes Toward Congress." In *Congress and the Decline of Public Trust*. Boulder: Westview Press. (pp. 79-99)

WEEK 15: APRIL 23 - APRIL 27: Policy Responsiveness and Course Wrap-Up

Tuesday * Gilens, Martin. 2005. "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69:778-96. (READING GUIDE AVAILABLE ON SAKAI)

Thursday ND: Public Opinion and Public Policy (Chapter 16 - Campbell)

FINAL EXAM - Tuesday, May 1 (1:00-3:00pm)