

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO, FALL 2015

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Office Hours: Wednesdays from 2:15-4:15pm and Fridays from 10:30-11:30am

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* (**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/>).

We will also be using the Top Hat interface for quizzes (see below), in-class activities, and to stimulate class discussions. The join code for this class is: 619756. This is a subscription service that you use via your phone, laptop, or tablet. You can subscribe for one semester for \$16 or get a 5-year subscription for \$35. Also, note that if you purchased an iClicker for a previous class you can exchange it for a one semester subscription to Top Hat. For more information, please contact Instructional Technology and Research Support at itrs@luc.edu.

QUIZZES. At the beginning of many class sessions we will have brief quizzes. These quizzes will consist of one or two multiple choice questions that focus on the reading for the day. You will complete each quiz using the Top Hat interface (a question will be shown on the projector and you will respond using your phone or other device). You will automatically receive 60% for being in class to complete the quiz. For two-item quizzes you will receive 20% for each correct response; for one-item quizzes you will receive 40% for a correct response.

These quizzes are intended to provide an incentive for you to keep up with the readings and be prepared for class meetings. The questions will only cover basic, core ideas from the assigned reading for that day—you should not need to “study” for them. 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. you must have your phone in class to complete these quizzes;
3. 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 three lowest scores and average only the remaining scores.*

EXAMS. We will have two in-class exams, each consisting of multiple choice and short essay questions. The first will be at the end of the fourth week of classes (September 18th). This exam will cover the material from the first section of the course. I expect you to be prepared to show that you understand how public opinion surveys are conducted, the factors that can shape responses to these surveys, and the basics of how to interpret the data generated by these surveys. I will ask you to interpret public opinion data and critique claims about how the public feels about specific political matters. The second exam will be at the end of the eleventh week of class (November 6th). It will cover the material from weeks 5-11 of the course.

The final exam will take place on Monday, December 16 at 9:00am. This exam will be cumulative, but greater weight will be given to the material from the last four weeks of the course. The exam will include multiple choice questions as well as several essay questions.

SHORT WRITING. There are three short (2-3 pages) writing assignments for the class. For the first you will use Roper’s iPoll database or other online resources to find three questions fielded in national surveys around the same time (no more than a year or so apart). These questions should each ask respondents about the same policy matter but yield different patterns of responses (i.e., they should suggest different conclusions about how supportive the public is of the policy in question). In your paper 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?
- Did the people writing one or more of the survey questions do a poor job?
- If an elected official wanted to respond to what the public wants, what should she make of the survey findings? Should she field another survey? If so, how would it be different? How would it help the official better understand the nature of public opinion in this policy area?

Your paper should include an appendix (not counted toward the length of the paper) with full details about the questions you are using: question wording, response options provided, distribution of responses (percent of respondents giving each response), and information about how the surveys you are drawing questions from were conducted (date of survey, name of polling firm, target population, number of respondents). Please take the time to format this nicely.

You should bring an outline or draft of your paper, as well as five copies of your Appendix to class on Wednesday, September 9. A final version of the paper is due on Wednesday, September 16.

The remaining two short writing assignments will be based on readings from two of the days in weeks 5-15 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.

In addition: For each of these two writing assignments, please write one multiple choice question and one short essay question about the reading that you think I should include on an exam. The multiple choice question should include 5 response options; the essay question should be possible to answer in 3-6 sentences (about a paragraph). Indicate which multiple choice response is correct and provide a model answer for the essay question. **Do not count this portion of the assignment when considering the length of your paper.**

RESEARCH 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 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 your 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 Monday, November 23.

FOR ALL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS, PLEASE SUBMIT A HARDCOPY OF YOUR PAPER AND ALSO SUBMIT IT VIA THE ASSIGNMENTS PAGE ON SAKAI. I will mark up the hardcopy to return it to you. The electronic submission will serve two purposes: 1) it will serve as a formal backup in case a hardcopy goes missing; 2) it will provide a way for your paper to 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: 10%	A = 93.00% or higher	C+ = 77.00 - 79.99%
Short Writing x 3: 5%/each	A- = 90.00 - 92.99%	C = 73.00 - 76.99%
Research Paper: 15%	B+ = 87.00 - 89.99%	C- = 70.00 - 72.99%
Exam 1: 15%	B = 83.00 - 86.99%	D+ = 67.00 - 69.99%
Exam 2: 20%	B- = 80.00 - 82.99%	D = 60.00 - 66.99%
Final Exam: 25%		

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*.

PLEASE IGNORE anything about “points” in Sakai. This is a feature that cannot be disabled and that does not calculate grades as outlined above. Similarly, the Top Hat gradebook should be ignored. Your quiz scores will be imported into Sakai and included in your running course grade there.

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. Because the nature of these situations varies, 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.

In all situations I require documentation of your reason for missing class or an assignment. This requirement extends to situations where there is a death in the family. If you would prefer not to discuss your situation with me directly you can provide documentation to your academic advisor and ask him or her to contact me to confirm that documentation has been provided. In fact, I strongly encourage you to discuss events like this with your academic advisor as they presumably have consequences for all of your classes—not just this one.

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 Wednesdays from 2:15-4:15pm and Fridays from 10:30-11:30am. 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 other than for Top Hat quizzes. 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 (by copying from another student, use of a “cheat sheet,” or other means) 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. Note that records of academic misconduct may be transmitted to medical school, law schools, and other organizations who have a legitimate reason to inquire. Also note that 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).

DISCLAIMER: The schedule, policies, and assignments described in this document are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

4 Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

- UPO = Understanding Public Opinion
ND = New Directions in Public Opinion
* = Empirical reading (see Short Writing assignments above)

Measuring Public Opinion

WEEK 1: AUGUST 24 - AUGUST 28: Introduction to Public Opinion

Monday *No reading assignment*

Wednesday Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 5)

Friday ND: The History and Meaning of Public Opinion (Chapter 1 - Herbst)

WEEK 2: AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 4: Defining and Measuring Public Opinion

Monday ND: The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges (Chapter 2 - Hillygus)
UPO: Appendix: A Primer on Statistics and Public Opinion (pp. 257-262 only)

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

Friday *No reading assignment*

WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 7 - SEPTEMBER 11: Question Wording, Non-Attitudes, and Other Complications

Monday NO CLASS - Labor Day

Wednesday *No Reading; Draft of Question Comparison Assignment Due*

Friday Swanbrow, Diane. 2012. "OMG! Texting ups truthfulness, new iPhone study suggests."
Schuman, Howard and Stanley Presser. 1981. *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys*. New York: Academic Press. (Chapter 4 - pp. 113-128 only)

WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 14 - SEPTEMBER 18: Answering Questions with Public Opinion Data

Monday UPO: The Diverse Paths to Understanding Public Opinion (Introduction - Norrander & Wilcox)

Wednesday UPO: Appendix: A Primer on Statistics and Public Opinion (pp. 263-268 only)

Friday **EXAM 1**

Is the Public Competent?

WEEK 5: SEPTEMBER 21 - SEPTEMBER 25: Are People's Attitudes Organized?

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

Wednesday *No reading assignment*

Friday Graber, Doris. 1994. "Why Voters Fail Information Tests: Can the Hurdles Be Overcome?" *Political Communication* 11: 331-346.

WEEK 6: SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 2: What Does the Public Need to Know?

- Monday Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20: 109-130.
- Wednesday * Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88: 63-76.
- Friday ND: Two-thirds full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance (Chapter 3 - Gilens)

Where Do Attitudes Come From?

WEEK 7: OCTOBER 5 - OCTOBER 9: Social Forces

- Monday NO CLASS - Mid-Semester Break
- Wednesday Hirshleifer, David. 1995. "The Blind Leading the Blind: Social Influence, Fads, and Informational Cascades." in *The New Economics of Human Behavior*. Cambridge University Press.
- Friday * Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71: 782-799.

WEEK 8: OCTOBER 12 - OCTOBER 16: Self-Interest

- Monday * 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.
- Wednesday Sears, David O. and Funk, Carolyn L. 1990. "Self-interest in Americans' Political Opinions." In *Beyond Self-Interest* (pp. 147-170). University of Chicago Press.
- Friday Miller, Dale T. 1999. "The Norm of Self-Interest." *American Psychologist* 54: 1053-1060.

WEEK 9: OCTOBER 19 - OCTOBER 23: Psychological Factors

- Monday * ND: Personality and Public Opinion (Chapter 10 - Mondak & Hibbing)
- Wednesday ND: The Emotional Foundations of Democratic Citizenship (Chapter 9 - Brader)
- Friday UPO: The Ultimate Source of Political Opinions (Chapter 3 - Hibbing & Alford)

WEEK 10: OCTOBER 26 - OCTOBER 30: The Role of Groups

- Monday ND: Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion (Chapter 6 - Junn, Mendelberg, & Czaja)
- Wednesday * ND: Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion (Chapter 7 - Burns & Kinder)
- Friday * ND: A Jump to the Right, A Step to the Left: Religion and Public Opinion (Chapter 8 - Campbell, Layman, & Green)

WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 2 - NOVEMBER 6: Partisanship

- Monday * 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).
- Wednesday ND: Partisanship and Polarization (Chapter 5 - Hetherington)
- Friday **EXAM 2**

Special Topics

WEEK 12: NOVEMBER 9 - NOVEMBER 13: Attitudes about Specific Policies I

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

Wednesday * UPO: Public Opinion, Civil Liberties, and Security in the Post 9/11 Context (Chapter 5 - Davis)

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

WEEK 13: NOVEMBER 16 - NOVEMBER 20: Attitudes about Specific Policies II

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

Wednesday * Citrin, Jack and Samantha Luks. 2001. "Political Trust Revisited: Déjà Vu All Over Again?" In *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 9-27)

Friday * 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 14: NOVEMBER 25 - NOVEMBER 29: Attitudes about Government

Monday * Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2001. "Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be." *American Political Science Review* 95: 145-153.

Wednesday NO CLASS -

Friday Thanksgiving Break

WEEK 15: NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 4: Public Opinion and Policy

Monday * Gilens, Martin. 2005. "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69:778-96.

Wednesday ND: Public Opinion and Public Policy (Chapter 13 - Campbell)

Friday ND: Assessing Continuity and Change (Conclusion: Sears)

FINAL EXAM - Friday, December 11 (9:00-11:00am)