

Fall 2007

PS 3112: American Public Opinion

208 Anderson Hall
TR 10:10-11:30 a.m.

Professor Kevin Arceneaux
453 Gladfelter Hall
Office Hours: T 1:30-3:00 p.m.
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Course Description

How do people form opinions about political issues and how do we go about measuring those opinions? Do those opinions shape public policy or do politicians manipulate public opinion in order to serve their own interests? Is the news media a public watchdog or just a mouthpiece for powerful elites? Does widespread disinterest in politics undermine democracy? Do Americans even like democracy? These are some of the questions we will tackle this semester.

This course surveys the broad swath of scholarship devoted to understanding the role that mass-level political opinions play in a democratic system. To this end, we will explore psychological, sociological, and economic theories that attempt to explain how individuals form opinions, the process through which those opinions are aggregated, and the extent to which public policy reflects public opinion. We will also pay special attention to the way in which elite sources of information transmitted through the news media and election campaigns shape public opinion.

Required Materials

Most of the course's reading can be downloaded from Blackboard, but we will also be reading two books:

Fiorina, Morris. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

It is your responsibility to acquire these required materials. The books are available for purchase in the bookstore or from a book retailer on the Internet (e.g., Amazon) and are on reserve in the library for limited access.

Course Reading

Because this is an upper-division course, one of its major goals is to give you an understanding of how scholars approach and study the questions that we will be covering. As a result, we will mostly read texts from primary sources (e.g., academic journal articles) as opposed to secondary sources (e.g., textbooks). It is not important that you master the technical aspects of these texts in order to comprehend the general thrust and significance of the theoretical arguments and empirical findings. Yet because the material is often written in a style that you may find unfamiliar and challenging, it is absolutely necessary that you provide yourself with enough time to digest the reading prior to class. I strongly encourage you to take notes on the reading.

Doing well on the exams is impossible without completing the assigned readings. In order to help motivate you complete the readings, each class will begin with a short quiz on the reading. The quizzes will be closed book, but you can use your own notes on the reading to help you answer the questions. So, it's important to stay on top of the reading and take notes. Not only will this help you on the exams, but it will also improve the value of lectures.

Course Grade

Course grades will be based on participation, quizzes, two midterms and a final exam. Each will be weighted accordingly:

First Midterm	25%
Second Midterm	25%
Final Exam	25%
Quizzes	15%
Participation	<u>10%</u>
	100%

The two closed-book, no-notes midterms and the final exam are weighted equally for your overall course grade (75 percent of your total grade). The quizzes are worth 15 percent of your grade, and because we all have our bad days, I will drop your two lowest quiz grades. Finally, 10 percent of your grade will be based on your participation in class. I expect students to come to class prepared and contribute to class discussions. In sum, if you want to do well in the class, please read and talk.

Testing and Grading Policy

The course is divided into three sections, separated by midterms and concluding with the final. Please be prepared to be tested on all of the topics addressed in both lecture and in the readings during these sections. **At least half of the exam questions will come from the reading assignments.** Please do not assume that if we do not talk about a reading assignment in class that it will not be on the test. Lecture material is meant to

supplement, not reiterate, the readings. If you keep up with the readings and take notes on them, this won't be an obstacle to doing well in the class. Also, do not hesitate to ask me or the teaching assistant questions about the readings or lecture material in and outside of class. If you cannot make it to my office hours, let me know and I'll arrange to meet you at a different time. The same goes for the teaching assistant.

Grade inflation weakens the quality of your degree and education. I expect students to earn passing grades. I want you to demonstrate a command of the material (both from lectures and readings) and an ability to evaluate and critique ideas. A solid exam answer not only clearly states the main point and relevant details of an argument, but also shows me that you've thought about it. In short, I'm asking you to demonstrate critical thinking, not just rote knowledge.

All of the assignments will be graded (with my supervision) by the course teaching assistant, Kathy Seizer, who is a graduate student in political science and will be attending course lectures. If you think a grade was given in error, please contact Kathy during her office hours and ask her to explain your grade and, if necessary, re-grade it. If after this consultation you still believe the grade is in error, I will be happy to re-grade your exam. Yet please be prepared to explain specifically why your grade should be raised. Also keep in mind that your grade can either go up or down during a re-grade, so only bring legitimate complaints.

Late Policy

I do not accept late work and I do not give make-up tests. It is your responsibility to keep track of test dates and prepare accordingly. I will only make exceptions for university excused absences and documented extreme circumstances. *If you want to be considered for these exceptions, you must contact me **before** the exam.* I will not give make-up exams to students who contact me after the test has occurred.

Attendance Policy

Please attend class. It will be difficult to do well if you are not here for lectures to take notes and participate in discussions. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to make arrangements with other students in the class to obtain notes and assignments or announcements that you missed. (Please don't ask me or the TA for lecture notes.) You can contact your fellow students using Blackboard.

Communication Policy

If you have a question about the readings, lectures, or anything else course-related I encourage you to speak with Kathy or me. Please feel free to drop by during office hours (listed at the top of the syllabus). If you cannot meet during office hours, please make arrangements to meet at a time that is mutually convenient. You can also email either of us with questions. If you email Kathy or me, I request that you follow these guidelines:

1. Sign your email with your first and last name. I will not respond to unsigned emails.
2. Use a respectful tone. Informal language and salutations are not considered respectful.
3. Use Standard English spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
4. Clearly state your question(s).
5. Please do not email Kathy or me if it is merely to tell us that you've missed a class (see attendance policy).

Classroom Decorum

I expect everyone in the class (including myself) to treat others with respect. We will discuss controversial topics throughout the semester and I would like to create an atmosphere in which all students feel comfortable expressing their views. It is okay to disagree with other students and me (in fact, I encourage it), but it is not okay to denigrate others personally or to dismiss their ideas with hostility or political (or other kinds of) swear words.

Moreover, I ask everyone to follow standard norms of politeness. Please don't interrupt other students, talk during lectures, or fall asleep in class. I wouldn't talk or sleep while you were talking to me, so please show your fellow students and me the same respect that you would ask of us.

Special Accommodations

Any Student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215.204.1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Dates and Topics

Below are the list of course topics and reading assignments by date. **These dates are subject to change.** It is your responsibility to keep track of these dates and any changes made to them. (CR = Course Reader on Blackboard)

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
8/28	T	Introduction	
8/30	Th	No class – American Political Science Association Conference	
I. Individuals and Their Opinions			
Week 1: How Do People Form Political Attitudes?			
9/4	T	The Standard Social Science Model	CR #1: Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. <i>American Public Opinion</i> . “Political Socialization.”
9/6	Th	Self Interest versus Values	CR #2: Alford, John R. and John R. Hibbing. 2004. “Accepting Authoritative Decisions: Humans as Wary Cooperators.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 48 (1): 62-76.
Week 2: How Do People Organize Political Attitudes?			
9/11	T	The Role of Human Evolution	CR #3: Pinker, Steven. 2002. <i>The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature</i> , Chapters 2-3 (“Silly Putty” and “The Last Wall to Fall”)
9/13	Th	Ideology, Schemas, and Political Knowledge	CR #4: Bishop, George F. 2005. <i>The Illusion of Public Opinion</i> . “The Elusiveness of ‘Public Opinion.’” Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
Week 3: How Do People Process Political Information?			
9/18	T	Theories of Information Processing	CR #5: David P. Redlawsk. 2001. “You Must Remember This.” <i>Journal of Politics</i> , 63 (1): 29-58.
9/20	Th	Heuristics	CR #6: Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 2001. “Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 45 (4): 951-71.
Week 4: Section Wrap-up			
9/25	T	Section Wrap-up	
9/27	Th	Midterm Exam I	
II. Putting the Public in Public Opinion			
Week 5: Measuring Public Opinion and Democratic Responsiveness			
10/2	T	An Overview of Survey Methodology	CR #7: Glynn, Carroll J., et al. 2004. <i>Public Opinion</i> . “Methods for Studying Public Opinion.” Cambridge, MA: Westview.
10/4	Th	Is Public Policy Shaped by Public Opinion?	CR #8: Erikson and Tedin. 2007. <i>American Public Opinion</i> . “Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy.”
Week 6: Majority Opinions toward Minority Groups			
10/9	T	Political Tolerance	CR #9: Mondak, Jeffery J. and Mitchell S. Sanders. 2003. “Tolerance and Intolerance, 1976-1998.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , Vol. 47, No.

			3. (Jul., 2003), pp. 492-502.
10/11	Th	Opinions about Race	CR #10: Carmines, Edward G. and Paul M. Sniderman. 2002. "The Structure of Racial Attitudes." In <i>Understanding Public Opinion</i> , Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox, eds.
Week 7: Divided by Parties: Are We at War with Ourselves?			
10/16	T	Party Identification	CR #11: Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. <i>Partisan Hearts and Minds</i> . "Partisan Groups as Objects of Identification."
10/18	Th	Investigating the Culture War	Fiorina, <i>Culture War</i> , entire book
Week 8:			
10/23	T	Section Wrap-up	
10/25	Th	Midterm Exam II	
III. What Shapes Public Opinion?			
Week 9: Does Public Opinion Lead or Follow?			
10/30	T	Propaganda and Elite Manipulation	CR #12: Bernays, Edward. 1928. <i>Propaganda</i> . "The New Propaganda."
11/1	Th	The Minimal Effects Model	CR #13: Klapper, Joseph T. 1960. <i>The Effects of Mass Communication</i> . "Reinforcement, Minor Change, and Related Phenomena."
Week 10: The Psychology of Changing Minds			
11/6	T	The Contingent Effects Model	CR #14: Ansolabehere, Stephen, Roy Behr, and Shanto Iyengar. 1993. <i>The Media Game</i> . "The Multiple Effects of Television on Public Opinion."
11/8	Th	Emotion and Crafted Talk	CR #15: Marcus, George E., W. Russell Neuman, and Michael Mackuen. 2000. <i>Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment</i> . "Dual Affective Subsystems."
Week 11: The Mass Media			
11/13	T	The News	CR #16: Sabato, Larry J. 1991. <i>Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics</i> . "The Press of Yesteryear."
11/15	Th	Agenda Setting	CR #17: Entman, Robert M. 2004. <i>Projections of Power</i> . "Projecting Power in the News."
Week 12: The Mass Media Continued			
11/20	T	Agenda Setting Cont.	
11/22	Th	No class - Thanksgiving	
Week 13: Is There a Better Way?			
11/27	T	Deliberative Democracy: The Promise	CR #18: Ackerman, Bruce and James S. Fishkin. 2003. "Deliberation Day." In James S. Fishkin and Peter Laslett, eds., <i>Debating Deliberative Democracy</i> . Malden, MA: Blackwell.
11/29	Th	Deliberative Democracy: The Critique	Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, <i>Stealth Democracy</i> , entire book.
Week 14: Wrap Up			
12/4	T	Section Wrap-up	
12/11	T	Final Exam, 11:00AM-1:00PM	

