

Public Opinion and American Politics

Political Science 4204: CRN 87367

Fall 2013

(T TR : 2:00-3:20pm at GS 111)

Instructor: Dukhong Kim

Office Hours: T R:1:00-2:00, and by appointment

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Prerequisite: POS2041 (Government of the United States)

Course Description

This class explores the nature and origins of public opinion and the role of public opinion in American politics. Specifically, this class addresses how citizens form their opinions on politics, what explains their opinions and choices on various political issues and policies, how elites and the mass media influence citizens' opinions, and what role public opinion plays in American politics. In examining these topics, students will be exposed to various theories of individual behavior that come from political science, economics, sociology, psychology, and even biology.

Course Objectives: A practical goal of this class is to equip students with the ability to be competent consumers of polling data and political information with critical eyes. After this class, students should be able to understand the polling information from newspapers, magazines, TV or the Internet, and to detect potential problems or pitfalls. Furthermore, students will be able to understand and analyze academic works.

Course Requirement: Students are required to read the assigned reading in advance of each class, to participate actively in the class discussions, and to execute various assignments including writing a paper, taking midterm and final exams, and presenting their work on the assigned readings. Students should take the Introduction to American Government (POS 2041) class before they take this class.

Teaching format: The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. I will lecture based on the text book, covering the main points of the chapters and providing illustrations from the readings or current news sources. To encourage discussion, I will regularly ask questions of the class. Students are strongly encouraged to bring their own questions, comments, and ideas to participate in the discussion.

Evaluation: Grades will be determined as follows.

Option 1

- Midterm exam (20%)
- Final exam (25%)
- Paper (35%)

- Attendance/participation/presentation (20%)

Option 2

- Midterm exam (20%)

- Final exam (25%)
- Essays (35%)
- Attendance/participation/presentation (20%)

Exams: There will be two exams - midterm and final. Both exams will include short identification and essay questions. The final will not be cumulative. The questions will be drawn from the books and the readings.

Paper: Each student must write a research paper on the questions they choose. Potential topics include change of public opinion on various policies (e.g., abortion, welfare, taxes, gay rights, foreign policy), the relationship between socio-demographic variables and opinions, and the influence of the mass media. The paper should be no more than 15 pages double spaced using 12 font size and one-inch margins. The paper needs to address the question directly with coherent arguments and evidence to support your main thesis. The due date of the completed paper is Nov 30. Prior to that you must also submit a draft of your paper that shows the progress you are making with your research topic and a literature review. These deadlines and the requirements for each step will be posted on Blackboard. Students should submit both a hard copy of the essay to the instructor and an electronic version of the final paper to the “SafeAssign” on Blackboard by the end of the class on the due date. The paper topic will be discussed as class progresses. Late submission of the paper will result in a deduction of 5 points per day out of 100 possible points.

Essays: Alternative to a research paper students can choose to write 3 critical essays based on the readings. The basic format of the essays should be the same as the paper. Each essay should be no more than 5 pages double spaced. Students need to identify major facts or points that authors argue, explain how they reach their conclusions and evaluate their studies in comparison with other studies on the topic -e.g., what are the contributions or limitations of these studies? Possible reading lists will be posted on Blackboard.

Attendance, Discussion and Presentation: Attendance is mandatory, and I will check it in every class. Students are allowed to have 2 exemptions throughout the semester without losing points. I believe in the exchange of ideas, discussions, and debates as important tools for learning about American politics. Thus, it is important to engage in constructive debates in the class as well as to make good comments on the subjects and issues. It is necessary to read the text and the other books in advance to prepare and participate in the discussions. Each student (or a group of students) will have at least one chance to present topics that they choose for themselves. The format of the presentations is informal. We will organize the presentation schedule as the class progresses.

Important Dates: Midterm: Oct. 7
 Essay due: Sept. 21, Oct. 26, Nov.23
 Final paper due: Nov. 30
 Final exam: TBA

Electronics: Students should turn off their cell phones and Palm pilots before class, and should refrain from surfing the internet or responding to email or IM during class.

General rules of conduct in the class room: Students must inform instructor in advance if they have to leave early. Also there are other behavioral issues (e.g., eating during the class, packing before the end of the class, surfing websites, reading newspapers during the lecture, and others) that I do not list in detail here, but they should be avoided to create a favorable learning environment.

Grading standard: Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scoring scheme. A(94-100), A-(90-93), B+(87-89), B(83-86), B-(80-82), C+(77-79), C(73-76), C-(70-72), D+(67-69), D(63-66), D-(60-62), F: below 60

Emergencies: If an emergency arises during the semester that makes fulfillment of class requirements difficult, please discuss the situation with me as early as possible, so we can discuss how to resolve the problem and maintain your good standing.

Makeup exam policy: In general, I do not allow makeup exams except in cases of medical or unmanageable emergencies. In these cases, students need to document the situation.

Special needs: If you need special assistance, you need to inform me on the first day of class. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) - in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 139 (561-799-8698) - and follow all OSD procedures.

Academic honesty: Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the University mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the University community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001_Code_of_Academic_Integrity.pdf

Required Texts: ¹

1. Herbert Asher. 2007. *Polling and the Public*. CQ Press.

¹You may use the earlier edition of the textbook.

Other reading materials are available from Blackboard.

Reading schedule²

I. Public Opinion and Democracy : Aug. 24/26

Topics: The role of the public in American democracy.

Erikson Tedin ch 1. Asher ch 1

Key, V.O. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York, NY: Random House, 1961, pp. 3-18

Carroll J. Glynn, Susan Herbst, Garrett J. O'Keefe, Robert Y. Shapiro, Mark Lindeman. 2004. *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ch 1 and 2. Available on the web.

II. Measurement and Interpretation of Public Opinion :

Topics:

- How do we collect and measure public opinion?
- What are the proper ways to interpret the data collected through surveys?
- What are the potential problems in dealing with surveys?

Measurement: Aug. 31

Asher ch 4: sampling techniques, ch 5: interviewing and data collection procedures

Erikson Tedin ch 2

Interpretation of polling data: Sept. 2

Asher Chapter 8

Norrander Barbara and Clyde Wilcox. 2001. *Understanding Public Opinion*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press. pp. 343-55

Potential problems of surveys: Sept. 7

Asher. ch 3- Wording and context of questions

Erikson and Tedin ch 2

Berinsky, Adam. 2005. *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Representation in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ch 1

III. Sources of Public Opinion

- What explains the way that the public forms its opinions?
- How do social institutions affect public opinion?
- How do psychological factors or genetic elements influence public opinion?
- How does emotion influence our opinion?

²This schedule is subject to change according to the progress of the class.

- Are individuals motivated by instrumental considerations or symbols in making their choices and opinions?

Socialization : Sept 9/ 14

Erikson and Tedin ch 5

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1968. "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child." *American Political Science Review* 62(1): 169-184

Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital" *P.S.: Political Science and Politics* 28(4): 664-83.

Racial resentment: Sept. 16

Kinder, Donald R., and Lynn M. Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ch 5.

Genetics: Sept. 21

Alford, John R., Carolyn L. Funk, and John R. Hibbing. 2005. "Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?" *American Political Science Review*. 99(May): 153-167.

Essay 1 Due on Sept. 21

Affect: Sept. 23

Marcus, George E., and Michael MacKuen. 1993. "Anxiety, Enthusiasm and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and Involvement During Presidential Campaigns." *APSR* 87 (3): 672-685.

Rationality and Self-interest vs. Symbols: Sept 28/ Sept 30/Oct 5

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row. ch 1-3

Campbell, Andrea. 2002. "Self-Interest, Social Security, and the Distinctive Participation Patterns of Senior Citizens." *American Political Science Review* 96: 565-574.

Sears, David O., Richard R. Lau, Tom Tyler, and A. M. Allen Jr. 1980. "Self-Interest versus Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting." *American Political Science Review* 74: 670-684.

Midterm: Oct. 7

IV. Competence of the Public

- Are citizens competent in organizing and forming their opinions?
- What are the standards for competent citizens?

- What is the role of ideology in organizing citizens' attitudes?
- Does knowledge matter in shaping public opinion? If so, how does it influence the way citizens form opinions?
- Do heuristics help citizen's decisions, and can they substitute for full information?

Ideology and Organization of Opinion : Oct. 12/14/19

Converse, Phillip. 1966. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press. pp. 206-261.

Kinder, Donald R. 1983. "Diversity and Complexity in American Public Opinion." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*. Edited by Ada Finifter. Washington, DC: APSA Press.

Values : Oct. 21

Feldman, Stanley. 1988. "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Belief and Values." *American Journal of Political Science* 32: 416-446.

Knowledge and sophistication : Oct. 26/28

Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1997. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997, introduction, ch 4.

Essay 2 Due on Oct. 26

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ch 2 and 3 ch 2- information, predisposition, and opinion; ch 3- How citizens acquire information and turn it into opinion

Heuristics I: Nov. 2

Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88 (1): 63-76.

Heuristics II: Nov. 4 Kuklinski, James H., and Paul J. Quirk. 2000. "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion." In Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin (eds.), *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

V. Society and Public Opinion:

Topics: The role of elites and the mass media in understanding public opinion

Framing and the media effect : Nov. 9/16

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstration of the Not-so-minimal Consequences of Television News Programs." *American Political Science Review* 76: 848-858.

Gilens, Martin. 2000. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ch

5 and 6.

Dennis Chong and James M. Druckman (2007), "The Influence of Democratic Competition on Public Opinion," *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 637-55.

VI. Public Opinion on Policies

Topics: The sources of public opinion on domestic and foreign policy

Domestic policies: Nov. 18

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the Public Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 15-31.

Opinion on Foreign Policy: Nov. 18

Gartner, Scott Sigmund. 2008. "The Multiple Effects of Casualties on Public Support for War: An Experimental Approach." *American Political Science Review* 102(1):95-106.

VII. The Influence of Public Opinion on Policy/Elites: Nov. 23

Topic: The impact of public opinion on elites' policy making

Glynn, Carroll, et al. 2004. *Public Opinion* (2nd edition). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ch 9 ("Public Opinion and Policymaking").

Suggested reading:

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ch 8.

Essay 3 Due on Nov. 23.

VIII. Public Opinion and American Democracy: Nov. 30

Verba, Sidney. 1996. "The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 90(4): 1-7.

Berelson, Bernard. 1950 "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16(3): 313-330.

Final exam: TBA