

Public Opinion

(Pol Sci 473)
Spring 2011

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Office Hours: Wednesday 11:00-1:00 p.m.
Course Website Address: <http://D2L.uwm.edu>

IMPORTANT: Please remember that I will be sending any email communications to your UWM email account. If you don't regularly use that account, make sure you check it or forward it to an account you do use regularly.

This is a course on public opinion. Most of us are familiar with the term *public opinion*, at least in a passing sense. In this course, we will go beyond common conceptions (and misconceptions) of public opinion and gain more of an academic perspective on this sometimes controversial and powerful term. I should be clear at the outset that public opinion, as a subject matter, is not just the purview of political science. In fact, the measurement of public opinion is a methodological tool used by many academic disciplines, private firms and organizations, and governmental agencies. That, said, we will focus mostly on applications of public opinion research in political science and closely related disciplines.

The first part of the course focuses on some foundational matters related to defining and measuring public opinion and then on some of the key sources of public opinion. The second part of the course focuses on a number of different substantive areas, or topics, that are typically the focus of public opinion research in political science. Finally the third part of the course focuses on two book-length applications of public opinion research. The purpose of reading these two books is to expose you to in-depth treatments of two important topics and to provide an opportunity to use what you learned earlier in the course as a basis for gaining as much as possible from the two books.

The keys to doing well in this class are the same as for any other class: do the readings, come to class, pay attention, participate, prepare for exams, do your own work, and turn things in on time. This is no secret but it is sometimes important to be reminded. The course material itself is not terribly difficult, but there is plenty of it so you need to stay on top of things if you want to do well.

Readings:

The following books should be purchased at the UWM Bookstore, or from an online vendor of your choice.

Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice, by Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. CQ Press. ISBN: 9780872893047 Price (new): \$54.95

Tides of Consent, by James Stimson. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9780521601177 Price (new): \$22.99

Value War, by Paul Brewer, Rowman & Littlefield Press. ISBN 0742562115 Price: (new) \$26.95

If funds are tight at the beginning of the semester, you can get away with just buying the Clawson and Oxley book through the first ten or so weeks of the term.

In addition to these books, a number of book chapters and articles from other sources are required throughout the semester. These readings are noted on the syllabus and are available on the course D2L page. See the last page of the syllabus for a listing of the supplemental readings.

Although unlikely, I reserve the right to assign additional readings. You will be given plenty of advance notice if this is the case.

Individual Conduct

Although my classrooms tend toward the informal side, this should not be confused with permission to be disrespectful or rude. I make every effort to treat students with respect and I expect students to treat each other and me with respect as well. Among other things, this means you should be paying attention to what is going on in the classroom, whether it is one of your classmates talking or me presenting material. It also means you should arrive at class on time and, if you are late, make sure you enter the room and take seat as unobtrusively as possible. It also means that you should use electronic products in class for class-related activities only. I know that I sometimes assume that no one can see or that no one cares when I check email on my phone in a group setting but the truth is that instructors always notice and it is usually a distraction to other students. Please bear this in mind.

Paper

The main writing assignment for this course is a research design paper in which you will propose a research topic, review relevant academic literature, propose hypotheses, and draft a survey that could be used to test those hypotheses. This paper is due at the end of the semester and there are three checkpoints for the paper throughout the semester.

Exams

There will be one midterm and one final exam for this course. These exams will likely follow a mixed format.

Assignments

A number of small assignments will be due during the semester. These assignments are not meant to be burdensome but will give you additional insights into different aspects of public opinion. Some of these assignments will be planned and some might occur to me as we are discussing topics in class. Typically, I will announce the assignments in class and will also post them on the D2L page.

Course Grade

The course grade is determined by the following elements:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Assignments | 5% |
| Paper Checkpoints | 5% |
| Paper | 20% |
| Midterm Exam | 35% |
| Final Exam | 35% |

Grading Scale

| | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| A | 93-100 | A- | 89-92 |
| B+ | 86-88 | B | 82-85 |
| B- | 78-81 | C+ | 75-77 |
| C | 71-74 | C- | 67-70 |
| D+ | 64-66 | D | 60-63 |
| D- | 56-59 | F | 0-55 |

Make-up Policy: As a general rule I do not allow students to make up missed assignments and exams or turn in late papers. Only in the most severe circumstances (death in the family, severe, documented illness, incarceration, etc.) will I make exceptions to this policy. This means that it is better to turn in a partially completed assignment or paper and receive partial credit than to turn it in late and receive no credit.

Academic Misconduct. Cheating on exams and plagiarism are violations of the academic honor code and carry severe sanctions, including failing a course or even suspension or dismissal from the University. For more information on these issues, consult: www.uwm.edu/osl/dean/conduct.cfm

University Policies: For specific information on UWM policies regarding religious observances, incompletes, academic misconduct, grade appeals, final examinations, students called to military service, discriminatory conduct, and complaint procedures, please go to www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf

Drop Date: March 18th is the last day to drop classes. If by the time you have not been keeping up with the readings, have not really gotten started on the paper, and/or have not been turning in assignments, you should think about whether it is wise to stay in this course.

Reading Schedule

Week of January

23rd **Meaning and History of Public Opinion.**
Clawson/Oxley chpt.1
Converse, 1987

The Nature of the Survey Response
Tourangneau et al. Chpt. 1
Berinsky, Chpt.1
Zaller and Feldman (1992, skim)

30th **The Survey Process and Potential Sources of Error**
Clawson and Oxley, Appendix
Groves et al. 2006, Chpt. 2
Weisberg, Chpt. 2
Asher, Chpt. 3

February

6th **Opinion Formation: Long-term Influences**
Clawson and Oxley, Chpt. 2
Jennings et al. (2009)
Alford et al. (2005)

13th **Opinion Formation: Short-term and Internal influences**
Clawson/Oxley, pp. 76-94, Chpts. 4&6

Checkpoint #1

20th **Groups and Group Differences**
Clawson and Oxley, Chpt. 9
Erikson and Tedin, Chpt. 7

27th **Ideology and Partisan Identities**
Clawson and Oxley, Chpt 5

Brooker and Schafer, Chpt. 8
Flanigan and Zingale, Chpt. 4

March

6th **Political Polarization**
Fiorina, Levendusky, Abramowitz, and Jacobson (2006)

13th **Exam on March 15th**

Begin Political Knowledge and Involvement
Clawson/Oxley, Chpt. 7
Mondak (2001)

20th **Spring Break**

27th **Political Knowledge and Involvement**
Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), Chpt. 6

Checkpoint #2

No class on the 31st

April

3rd **Civic Attitudes**
Clawson /Oxley Chpt. 10

Political Tolerance
Clawson /Oxley Chpt. 8

10th **Tolerance (cont.)**

Opinion—Policy Connection
Clawson/Oxley Chpt. 11

17th **Tides of Consent**
Stimson, Chpts. 1-3

24th **Tides of Consent**
Stimson, Chpts. 4-6

Checkpoint #3

May

1st **Value War**
Brewer Chpts. 1-4

8th **Value War**
Brewer Chpts. 5-7

Final Exam 10:00 a.m. to Noon, Tuesday, May 17th

Supplemental Readings

- Alford, John R, Funk, Carol L, and John R, Hibbing. 2005. "Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?" *American Political Science Review* 99:153-76.
- Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public*, 7th edition. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Berinsky, adam. 2004. *Silent Voices*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chpt 1.
- Brooker, Russell and Todd Shaefer. *Public Opinion in the 21st Century: Let the People Speak*. New York: Cengage Learning. Chapter 8.
- Converse, Philip E. 1987. "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion Polling." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51/Supplement 12-24.
- Delli Carpini, Michael, and Scott Keeter. 1997. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 6.
- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*, 8th edition. New York: Pearson Longman. Chapter 7.
- Fiorina, Morris, Mathew Levendusky, 2006. "Disconnected: The Political Class vs. the People." *In Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics, Volume 1*, edited by Pietra Nivola and Henry Brady. Baltimore, MD: Brookings Institution Press. Read comments by Abramowitz and Jacobson also.
- Flanigan, William H. and Nancy Zingale. 2009. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate* 11th edition. Washington, DC: CQ press. Chapter 4.
- Groves, Robert M., et al. 2006 . *Survey Methodology*, 2nd edition. Hoboken NJ: John Wiley and Sons Publishing. Chapter 2.
- Mondak, Jeffery. 2001. "Developing Valid Measures of Knowledge Scales." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:224-238.
- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. Politics across generations: Family transmission reexamined. *The Journal of Politics* 71, (3) (July): 782-799
- Tourganeau, Roger, Lance Rips, and Kenneth Rasinski. 2000. *The Psychology of the Survey Response*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Weisberg, Herbert. 2005. *The Total Survey Error Approach*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2.
- Zaller, John. 1991 "Information, Values, and Opinions." *American Political Science Review* 85:1215-38.
- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences" *American Journal of Political Science*, 36: 579-616