

## **Democracy and Representation: When, why, and how does public opinion matter?**

Master's Seminar 214A

Department of Political Science, Aarhus University

**Time:** Mondays 8.00-11.00

**Location:** Building 1330, Rm. 018

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### **Course Objectives**

The course module offers a more extensive and more thorough analysis of a topic from within political science. To this end, the course module provides an overview and a critical discussion of the literature and the issues relevant for the topic of the seminar.

This seminar trains students to:

- understand the role of public opinion in contemporary developed democracies.
- describe and evaluate the theoretical and empirical links between voters and their representatives.
- assess the strengths and weaknesses of surveys when trying to uncover public opinion, and distinguish a good survey design from a bad one.
- determine patterns of unequal representation, as well as their causes and consequences.
- understand the role of politicians in shaping public opinion.
- compare the different conceptions of the citizen-representative link and their implications.

### **Course Content**

How important is public opinion in representative democracies? Who gets listened to, and who gets ignored? When do politicians follow popular opinion and when do they shape it? In this course, we will explore these questions using research on contemporary democracies in the developed world. We begin by laying out the classical and state-of-the-art theories on the impact of public opinion on public policy. This will involve critically assessing the theoretical and empirical links between voters and their representatives, as well as the uses and abuses of survey data. Next, we investigate patterns of unequal representation, exploring their causes and consequences. We then turn the causal arrow around and consider the impact politicians have on attitudes in the short- and long-term. Finally, we conclude by comparing different conceptions of the proper citizen-representative link and discussing when and to what extent public opinion should shape policy in a democracy.

### **Comments on form of instruction**

The seminar module requires active participation of students. At the beginning of the seminar module the lecturer and the students agree on specific "activity requirements" that the students have to fulfil.

The module consists of 15 tutorials of three hours over a period of 16 weeks

### **Exam details**

Topic of student's choice, oral exam

*Grading:* External co-examination

*Assessment:* 7-point grading scale

*Notes:* The examination lasts approx. 30 minutes divided equally between examination in synopsis (800-1200 words, corresponding to approx. 2-3 pages) and in the general curriculum. There is no preparation.

Re-examination takes place in February and August. The assessment method is home assignment.

*Exam time:* 30 minutes

*Literature:* A collection of scanned book sections, electronic articles, and book chapters available as e-resources from the library.

*Reading Load:* The readings total just under 1200 pages.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

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### ***Unit 1: Introduction***

*Week 1: August 31*

#### **Why Study Public Opinion?**

Berelson, Bernard. 1952. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 16: 313-30.

Back, Kurt W. 1988. "Metaphors for Public Opinion in Literature." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 52: 278-88.

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

Brady, Henry E. 2000. "Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33: 47-57.

*Week 2: September 7*

**The Survey Method**

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.

Berinsky, Adam J. 2002. "Silent Voices: Social Welfare Policy Opinions and Political Equality in America." *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 276-87.

Biemer, Paul P. 2010. "Total Survey Error: Design, Implementation, and Evaluation." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74: 817-48.

***Unit 2: Exploring the Citizen-Policy Link***

*Week 3: September 14*

**Classical Approaches**

Downs, Anthony. 1957. "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy." *Journal of Political Economy* 65: 135-50.

Key, Valdimer Orlando. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York, NY: Knopf. Pp. 536-553, 555-556. [Available on Blackboard.]

Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *The American Political Science Review* 77: 175-90.

Page, Benjamin I. 1994. "Democratic Responsiveness? Untangling the Links between Public Opinion and Policy." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 27: 25-29.

*Week 4: September 21*

**Current Major Theories**

Jones, Bryan D. 1994. *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 224-239. [Available on Blackboard.]

Stimson, James A, Michael B MacKuen, and Robert S Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89: 543-65.

Wlezien, Christopher. 1995. "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 39: 981-1000.

Burstein, Paul. 2010. "Public Opinion, Public Policy, and Democracy." In *Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective*, ed. Kevin T Leicht. New York, NY: Springer. 63-79. [Available as an e-resource through the library.]

*Week 5: September 28*

**The Impact of Political Institutions**

Binzer Hobolt, Sara, and Robert Klemmensen. 2008. "Government Responsiveness and Political Competition in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 41: 309-37.

Wlezien, Christopher, and Stuart N. Soroka. 2012. "Political Institutions and the Opinion–Policy Link." *West European Politics* 35: 1407-32.

Bevan, Shaun, and Will Jennings. 2014. "Representation, Agendas and Institutions." *European Journal of Political Research* 53: 37-56.

Bernauer, Julian, Nathalie Giger, and Jan Rosset. 2015. "Mind the Gap: Do Proportional Electoral Systems Foster a More Equal Representation of Women and Men, Poor and Rich?". *International Political Science Review* 36: 78-98.

*Week 6: October 5*

**Democracy in the European Union**

Follesdal, Andreas, and Simon Hix. 2006. "Why There Is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44: 533-62.

Mair, Peter, and Jacques Thomassen. 2010. "Political Representation and Government in the European Union." *Journal of European Public Policy* 17: 20-35.

Bellamy, Richard, and Dario Castiglione. 2011. "Democracy by Delegation? Who Represents Whom and How in European Governance." *Government and Opposition* 46: 101-25.

Bølstad, Jørgen. 2015. "Dynamics of European Integration: Public Opinion in the Core and Periphery." *European Union Politics* 16: 23-44.

**\*\*\*No class October 12\*\*\***

*Week 7: October 19*

**Uses and Abuses of Public Opinion Data**

Druckman, James N, and Lawrence R Jacobs. 2006. "Lumpers and Splitters the Public Opinion Information That Politicians Collect and Use." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70: 453-76.

Birney, Mayling, Michael J. Graetz, and Ian Shapiro. 2006. "Public Opinion and the Push to Repeal the Estate Tax." *National Tax Journal* 59: 439-61.

Savigny, Heather. 2007. "Focus Groups and Political Marketing: Science and Democracy as Axiomatic?". *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 9: 122-37.

Jacobs, Lawrence. 2011. "The Betrayal of Democracy: The Purpose of Public Opinion Survey Research and its Misuse by Presidents." In *Manipulating Democracy*, eds. LeCheminant, Wayne and John Parrish. London, UK: Routledge. 190-208. [Available on Blackboard.]

### ***Unit 3: Who Gets Represented?***

*Week 8: October 26*

#### **"Default Man"**

Griffin, John D, and Brian Newman. 2005. "Are Voters Better Represented?". *Journal of Politics* 67: 1206-27.

Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A, and William Mishler. 2005. "An Integrated Model of Women's Representation." *Journal of Politics* 67: 407-28.

Griffin, John D, and Brian Newman. 2007. "The Unequal Representation of Latinos and Whites." *Journal of Politics* 69: 1032-46.

Fine, Jeffrey A, and Nadia N Aziz. 2013. "Does the Political Environment Matter? Arab-American Representation and September 11th." *Social Science Quarterly* 94: 551-68.

*Week 9: November 2*

#### **The Rich**

Flavin, Patrick. 2012. "Income Inequality and Policy Representation in the American States." *American Politics Research* 40: 29-59.

Flavin, Patrick. 2012. "Does Higher Voter Turnout among the Poor Lead to More Equal Policy Representation?". *The Social Science Journal* 49: 405-12.

Rosset, Jan, Nathalie Giger, and Julian Bernauer. 2013. "More Money, Fewer Problems? Cross-Level Effects of Economic Deprivation on Political Representation." *West European Politics* 36: 817-35.

Peters, Yvette, and Sander J Ensink. 2015. "Differential Responsiveness in Europe: The Effects of Preference Difference and Electoral Participation." *West European Politics* 38: 577-600.

*Week 10: November 9*

#### **The Organised**

Soule, Sarah A, and Brayden G King. 2006. "The Stages of the Policy Process and the Equal Rights Amendment, 1972–1982." *American Journal of Sociology* 111: 1871-909.

Mahoney, Christine. 2007. "Lobbying Success in the United States and the European Union." *Journal of Public Policy* 27: 35-56.

Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12: 564-81.

#### ***Unit 4: What Shapes Public Opinion?***

*Week 11: November 16*

##### **Political Parties**

Gabel, Matthew, and Kenneth Scheve. 2007. "Estimating the Effect of Elite Communications on Public Opinion Using Instrumental Variables." *American Journal of Political Science* 51: 1013-28.

Bullock, John G. 2011. "Elite Influence on Public Opinion in an Informed Electorate." *American Political Science Review* 105: 496-515.

Brader, Ted, Joshua A Tucker, and Dominik Duell. 2013. "Which Parties Can Lead Opinion? Experimental Evidence on Partisan Cue Taking in Multiparty Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 46: 1485-517.

Leeper, Thomas J, and Rune Slothuus. 2014. "Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Public Opinion Formation." *Political Psychology* 35: 129-56.

*Week 12: November 23*

##### **The Media**

Gamson, William A., and Andre Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 95: 1-37.

Bovitz, Gregory L., James N. Druckman, and Arthur Lupia. 2002. "When Can a News Organization Lead Public Opinion? – Ideology Versus Market Forces in Decisions to Make News." *Public Choice* 113: 127-55.

Azrout, Rachid, Joost Van Spanje, and Claes De Vreese. 2012. "When News Matters: Media Effects on Public Support for European Union Enlargement in 21 Countries." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 50: 691-708.

*Week 13: November 30*

##### **Policy Feedback**

Soroka, Stuart N, and Christopher Wlezien. 2005. "Opinion–Policy Dynamics: Public Preferences and Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom." *British Journal of Political Science* 35: 665-89.

Johnson, Martin, Paul Brace, and Kevin Arceneaux. 2005. "Public Opinion and Dynamic Representation in the American States: The Case of Environmental Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 86: 87-108.

Larsen, Christian Albrekt. 2008. "The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes: How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support." *Comparative Political Studies* 41: 145-68.

Kelly, Nathan J., and Peter K. Enns. 2010. "Inequality and the Dynamics of Public Opinion: The Self-Reinforcing Link between Economic Inequality and Mass Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 54: 855-70.

#### ***Unit 4: Should Public Opinion Matter?***

*Week 14: December 7*

##### **Should We Trust Public Opinion?**

Somin, Ilya. 1998. "Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal." *Critical Review* 12: 413-58.

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

Lupia, Arthur. 2006. "How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence." *Critical Review* 18: 217-32.

Arnold, Jason Ross. 2012. "The Electoral Consequences of Voter Ignorance." *Electoral Studies* 31: 796-815.

*Week 15: December 14*

##### **Public Opinion and "Good" Democracies**

Przeworski, A. (2010). *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 99-117. [Available on Blackboard.]

Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *American Political Science Review* 97: 515-28.

Druckman, James N. 2014. "Pathologies of Studying Public Opinion, Political Communication, and Democratic Responsiveness." *Political Communication* 31: 467-92.