

The University of Texas at Austin
Government 370L (39095)

Public Opinion and Representation

Fall, 2024

Christopher Wlezien

Class days/times: TTH 2:00-3:30

Room: PAR 301

Contact Information:

Office: 4.154 Batts

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Course Description

This course examines the relationship between the public and elected officials in representative democracy. It builds on democratic political theory but focuses heavily on empirical practice, particularly in the United States (US). Special attention is paid to the representation of public opinion in the composition of elected bodies, the positions politicians take, and government policy actions themselves. Along the way, we consider the roles played by characteristics of issues, electoral competition, political institutions, and political inequality, among other things. By the end of the course, students should have a good sense for how well and why elected officials represent the public in the US.

Course Format

This course consists of lectures and discussion, and class participation is important. Student will need to keep up with the reading and then be prepared to participate. To encourage this, students will receive extra credit based on the quality—not just quantity—of their contributions to class discussion. (See the description of “Grades” for details.) As the course has a writing flag, much of what we do relates to the paper you will be writing, which I describe in greater detail below and will discuss in class.

Grades

The main graded components for this class are the midterm and final examinations and a research paper due toward the end of the semester. Performance in the class will be assessed as follows:

33%	Midterm examination
33%	Final examination
34%	Paper—10 for draft paper, 24 for final paper
+0-3 %	Participation extra credit

In allocating grades, the following scale will be used:

A	93-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-90%
B	83-87%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-80%
C	73-77%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-70%
D	63-67%
D-	60-63%
F	< 60%

Examinations are based on readings, lectures, and discussion and may include short answer questions and essay questions. The final examination is cumulative, meaning that you are required to remember and integrate information from the first half of the course in order to complete the course in good standing.

Besides taking the exams, you will write a paper that analyzes the extent of representation in any elected unit in the US in which you have lived, e.g., state, congressional district, city.

Specifically, you will assess whether and to what extent it provides descriptive, substantive, symbolic, and/or very selective casework/earmark representation to the constituency. You may choose the US House or Senate, the Congressional delegation from one state, the upper or lower houses of a state, a city council, or the like. You do not need to write about each and every district (or institution) in detail, of course. You also do not need to write about each and every social and demographic group, i.e., you may conduct an in-depth analysis of one group or else various groups. *Your paper should not only rely on demographic and/or legislative data obtained online, and should include primary sources and the course materials themselves.*

I will provide additional information about the paper in class. For now, note that the length of the paper will be 8-10 typed (using 12-point font) double-spaced pages, or 2,000-2,500 words, and it is due by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 5. Note that there are a series of deadlines relating to the paper that you are expected to meet during the course of the semester, each of which is shown in the Course Outline below along with the dates we will provide feedback at each stage. Specifically, you must submit an initial proposal, then a final proposal, an outline of the paper, and a draft of the paper, all before submitting the final paper.

Readings

The course readings include four books, which are available in the university bookstore and elsewhere:

Brunell, Thomas. 2008. *Redistricting and Representation: Why Competitive Elections are Bad for America*. Routledge.

Mezey, Michael L. 2008. *Representative Democracy: Legislators and their Constituents*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver. 1993. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Soroka, Stuart and Christopher Wlezien. 2010. *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion and Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

→Three of these books – those by Brunell, Mezey, and Soroka & Wlezien – are available through Longhorn Textbook Access at the UT Coop, which offers discounted pricing for (perpetual) digital access but **requires you to decline** by the 12th class day should you not want to purchase books this way.

Various journal articles and book chapters also are required and these—as well as additional reading pertaining to specific subject areas—are listed in the course outline that follows. Required readings that are not readily available will be posted on Canvas, and yet other readings may be distributed during the course, as appropriate.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Academic Dishonesty

UT prohibits academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism; see

<http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-c/student-discipline-and-conduct/>. Also see the UT Honor Code <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/>.

Religious Holidays

UT policy allows students to miss a class, examination or assignment to observe a religious holy day. Students are expected to notify professors of the pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day, and will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Classroom Safety and COVID-19

To help preserve an in-person learning environment, the University of Texas at Austin recommends the following:

- Get vaccinated, which will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated.
- Adhere to university [mask guidance](#).
- Use [Proactive Community Testing](#), an important part of the university's efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free.
- Visit [protect.utexas.edu](#) for more information

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

August 27: Introductory class.

Required reading:

NONE.

August 29: Why representation?

Required reading:

Mezey book, chapters 1-2. (CANVAS)
 Madison, James. Federalist papers #10 and #51. (CANVAS)

For further reading:

Urbinati, Nadia, and Mark Warren. 2008. “The Concept of Representation in Contemporary Democratic Theory.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11:387-412.
 Ferejohn, John, and Frances McCall Rosenbluth. 2017. *Forged Through Fire*. New York: Liveright (WW Norton).

September 3: Your Experiences with Representation

Required reading:

Mezey book, chapter 3 (to page 64). (CANVAS)

Assignment:

Consider your experiences with representation in different electoral units, e.g., at the city, county, state and national levels. Have you been represented well or poorly? Have you been better represented at some levels than others? Why or why not?

September 5: NO CLASS – APSA annual meeting

Assignment:

Consider possible topics for your papers; to be clear, just “consider” for now...

September 10: What is representation?

→ Be prepared to discuss possible paper topics.

Required reading:

Mezey book, chapter 7 (to page 185).

For further reading:

Wlezien, Christopher. 2015. “A Public Opinion and American Democracy Retrospective.” In Steven Balla, Martin Lodge and Edward Page (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Classics of Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (CANVAS)

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

September 12: Who Gets Represented? The Right to Vote

Required reading:

Levin, Ines. 2013. “Political Inclusion of Latino Immigrants: Becoming a Citizen and Political Participation.” *American Politics Research* 41(4): 535-568. (CANVAS)

Uggen, Christopher, Angela Behrens, and Jeff Manza. 2005. “Criminal Disenfranchisement.” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 1:307-322. (CANVAS)

Recommended:

The Sentencing Project: <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=133>.

NOTE: This Sentencing Project advocates for reform but the site does contain good information about laws regarding felony disenfranchisement and actual numbers too.

September 17: Who Gets to Represent? How Voting Rules Matter

Required reading:

Riker, William. 1982. *Liberalism against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. San Francisco: WH Freeman. (CANVAS)

Skim Mackie, Gerry. 2003. *Democracy Defended*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 1. (CANVAS)

For further reading:

Hibbing, John and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2001. "Process Space and American Politics." *American Political Science Review* 95:145-153.

September 19: Forms of representation: trustee and delegate.

➔ Prepare to discuss paper proposals.

Required reading:

Mezey, *skim* chapter 4; read all of chapter 5.

Carman, Christopher. 2007. "Assessing Preferences for Political Representation in the US." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 17:1-19. (CANVAS)

For further reading:

Fenno, Richard. 1977. "US House Members in their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71:883-917.

Assignment:

Prepare a proposal including a title and one short paragraph (150-200 words) outlining the focus.

September 24: On Constituencies and Districting

➔ Initial paper proposals due.

Required reading

Mezey, Chapter 3 (pages 64-84).

Rush, Mark E. 1994. "Gerrymandering: Out of the Political Thicket and into the Quagmire." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 27:682-685. (CANVAS)

September 26: On Districting and Representation, part 1

[Draft proposals returned with comments]

Required reading:

Brunell, pages 1-74.

October 1: On Districting and Representation, part 2

Required reading:

Brunell, pages 75-125.

October 3: Descriptive Representation: Demographic Characteristics

Be familiar with:

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes.'" *Journal of Politics* 61: 628-657. (CANVAS)

Required reading:

Review Mezey, chapter 3, especially pages 76-84.

Carroll, Susan. 1999. "Representing Women: Congresswomen's Perceptions of their Representative Roles." Unpublished ms. (CANVAS)

For further reading:

Barreto, Matt, Gary Segura and Nathan Woods. 2004. "The Mobilizing Effect of Majority-Minority Districts on Latino Turnout." *American Political Science Review* 98: 65-75.

October 8: Substantive Constituency Representation: Roll Calls

➔ Final paper proposals due.

Required reading:

Butler, Daniel M. and David W. Nickerson. 2011. "Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6:55-83. (CANVAS)

Skim Eulau, Heinz, John C. Wahlke, William Buchanan, and Leroy C. Ferguson. 1959. "The Role of the Representative: Some Empirical Observations on the Theory of Edmund Burke." *American Political Science Review* 53: 742–756. (CANVAS)

October 10: Dyadic and Collective Representation

[Final proposals returned with comments.]

Required reading:

Weissberg, Robert. 1978. "Collective vs. Dyadic Representation in Congress. *American Political Science Review* 72: 535–547. (CANVAS)

Skim Bafumi, Joseph, and Michael Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of American Voters and Their Members in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104: 519–542. (CANVAS)

For further reading:

Powell, G. Bingham. 2004. "Political Representation in Comparative Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7:273-296.

October 15: MIDTERM EXAM

October 17: On Policy Representation

[Graded exams returned, *hopefully*.]

Required reading:

Wlezien, Christopher and Stuart Soroka. 2021 (2016). "Public Opinion and Public Policy." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (CANVAS)

October 22: Public Priorities and Government Attention

[Graded exams returned if they weren't already on the 13th.]

Required reading:

Jones, Bryan and Frank Baumgartner. 2005. *The Politics of Attention*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapter 1. (CANVAS)

Skim Jones, Bryan, Heather Larsen-Price, and John Wilkerson. 2009. "Representation And American Governing Institutions." *Journal of Politics* 71:277-290. (CANVAS)

October 24: NO CLASS

There is no reading and your assignment is to draft outlines of your papers, about which I will provide more information in class; I will be holding additional office hours during the class meeting time!

October 29: Representation in Policy Outputs: Across Space (in the American States)

➔ Two-page *double-spaced* paper outlines due.

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 1-4

October 31: Representation in the American States continued

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 5-7

November 5: Representation in the American States concluded

[Outlines returned with comments.]

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 8-10.

Skim Lax, Jeffrey R. and Justin H. Phillips. 2012. "The Democratic Deficit in the States." *American Journal of Political Science* 56:148-166. (CANVAS)

November 7: Traditional Approaches: Consistency and Covariation

Required reading:

Monroe, Alan. 1998. "Public Opinion and Public Policy 1980–1993." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62: 6–28. (CANVAS)

Skim Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *American Political Science Review* 77: 175–190. (CANVAS)

November 12: Representation in Policy Outputs: Across Time (in the US, UK, and CA)

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 1-3

November 14: Dynamic Representation continued.

➔ Draft papers due.

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 4, 5 and 7.

Optional:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapter 6.

November 19: Dynamic Representation concluded & Who Gets Represented?

[Draft papers returned with comments.]

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 8 and 9.

Required reading:

Skim. Soroka, Stuart and Christopher Wlezien. 2008. “On the Limits to Inequality in Representation.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (2):319-327. (CANVAS)

November 21: Who Gets Represented? On Unequal Influence

Required reading:

Skim: Gilens, Martin and Benjamin Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581. (CANVAS)

Branham, J. Alex, Stuart Soroka, and Christopher Wlezien. 2017. “When do the Rich Win?” *Political Science Quarterly* 132 (1): 43-62. (CANVAS)

<Http://www.demos.org/publication/why-voting-gap-matters>

For further reading:

Enns, Peter and Christopher Wlezien. 2011. “Group Opinion and the Study of Representation.” In Enns and Wlezien (eds.), *Who Gets Represented?* New York: Russell Sage. https://www.russellsage.org/sites/default/files/Enns_Wlezien_Chap1.pdf

November 26 & 28: NO CLASS – Happy Thanksgiving!

December 3: What about the Courts (in the US)?

Required reading:

Jessee, Stephen, Neil Malhotra, and Maya Sen. 2022. “A Decade-Long Longitudinal Survey Shows that the Supreme Court is now Much More Conservative than the Public.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(24): 1-7.

For further reading:

Jessee, Stephen and Neil Malhotra. 2013. “Public (Mis)Perceptions of Supreme Court Ideology.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 77(2):619-634.

December 5: On Implementation and Policy Outcomes

➔ FINAL PAPERS DUE

Required reading:

Berkman, Michael and Eric Plutzer. 2012. "Local Autonomy versus State Constraints: Balancing Evolution and Creationism in US High Schools." *Publius* 41:610-635. (CANVAS)

Enns, Peter. 2014. "The Public's Increasing Punitiveness and its Influence on Mass Incarceration in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 857-872. (CANVAS)

For further reading on representation and its consequences for politics

Wlezien, Christopher. 2017. "Policy (Mis)Representation and the Cost of Ruling: US Presidential Elections in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(6): 711-738. (CANVAS)

Skim Quinton Mayne and Armen Hakhverdian. 2017. "Ideological Congruence and Citizen Satisfaction: Evidence from 25 Advanced Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(6): 822-849. (CANVAS)

December 13: Final examination: 1:00-3:00 p.m.