

POLS 3318: Public Opinion

Faculty Information

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Student Hours: I provide various periods to meet with me to work with your schedule. Sign up to chat in my office or over Zoom here: <https://calendly.com/rebecca-larsen/office-hours>

Class Meeting Time: Mondays, 6PM – 8:50PM

Course Description

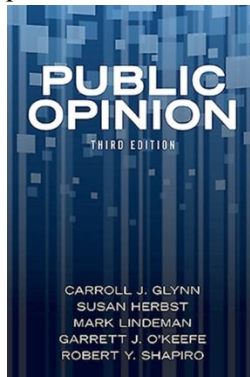
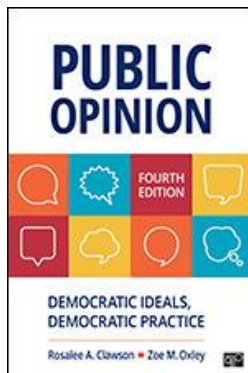
What is public opinion? How is it measured? What influences it? And what influence does it have? These are the questions we will examine together in this course. Connection to current events, an analysis of opinion polls, and a semester paper will further support and measure learning.

Learning Outcomes

1. Describe the significant theories and controversies in public opinion research.
2. Analyze the role of public opinion in a democracy.
3. Evaluate public opinion polls and their interpretations.
4. Describe the role of socialization in opinion holding.
5. Explain the influence of public opinion and how public opinion is influenced.

Course Materials

1. Clawson & Oxley. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. 4th Edition.



2. Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'Keefe, & Shapiro. *Public Opinion*. 3rd Edition.

These texts will be referred to as “Clawson” and “Glynn” respectively in the course plan. Other readings assigned in the course plan below will be available on Blackboard.

Grading

A = 90 – 100

B = 80 – 89

C = 70 – 79

D = 60 – 69

F = 0 – 59

Course Assignments

Course Engagement	15%
Quizzes	30%
Survey Assessment	15%
Final Paper	40%

Course Engagement – 15%

Because there are many ways to participate and care about your learning, you will submit a form at the end of the semester grading your engagement in the course and supporting that grade. This provides flexibility if you need to miss a class. Engagement can include active participation in class discussions, submission of in-class activities, presenting a current event, and actively listening to your classmates.

- **Current Event:** During one class period, you will bring a news article to class that covers public opinion. These will typically be news articles that cover recent surveys, but they can be any recent article that covers an issue of public opinion. You will share the link with the class, tell us about it, and offer up any critique.

Quizzes – 30% (10 at 3% Each)

Weekly quizzes will cover key ideas from the readings. You will have two chances to take each quiz and they are meant to incentivize reading before class, provide an opportunity to solidify key learning areas, and boost your grade. Your lowest quiz will be dropped for a total of 10 graded quizzes.

Opinion Survey Assessment – 15%

In this assignment you will identify two opinion polls on the same topic, present their results, and critique their components.

Public Opinion Policy Paper – 40%

This final paper asks you to examine a policy issue through the lens of public opinion. This assignment will connect the previous assignments and class concepts. You will select a policy issue and seek to understand what Americans believe and how it is influenced or influences. You will accomplish this by examining what public opinion is on this policy issue through the study of public opinion surveys. You will then connect public opinion on this issue to its concepts of perception, political party positions, or media coverage. Finally, you will determine whether public opinion has influenced policy in this area. Specific instructions are available on Blackboard.

Course Plan

*Subject to change. Any adjustments to this course plan will be communicated in class and via email.

Week	Subject	Readings	Due
Week 1 8/28	Introduction to the Course		Introduction to course Complete public opinion survey
Week 2 9/4	NO CLASS – Labor Day Holiday		
Week 3 9/11	What is Public Opinion? Role of the Public in Democracy	Clawson, Ch 1	Quiz
Week 4 9/18	Measuring Public Opinion Part I: Intro to Opinion Polls and Survey Methodology	Glynn, Ch 3 pp 57-70 Clawson, Ch 1 Appendix, Section: Public Opinion Surveys	Quiz
Week 5 9/25	Measuring Public Opinion Part II: Campaign Polls and Credibility	American Association for Public Opinion Research. 2020 Pre-Election Polling: An Evaluation of the 2020 General Election Polls Kuru, et al. (2017). Motivated reasoning in the perceived credibility of public opinion polls. <i>Political Opinion Quarterly</i> , 81(2).	Quiz
Week 6 10/2	Measuring Public Opinion, Part III: Focus Groups and Interviews	Clawson Ch 1 Appendix, Sections: Interviews, Focus Glynn Groups, Glynn, Ch 3 pp. 71-85	Quiz
Week 7 10/9	Socialization and Mass Media	Clawson, Chapter 2 (skim)	Quiz

		<p>Clawson, Chapter 3</p> <p>Executive Summary of: American Views 2022: Trust, Media, and Democracy</p> <p>Sharon Says So Podcast: How to Be a Good News Consumer</p>	Opinion Survey Assessment
Week 8 10/16	Ideology - Political Ideology, Polarization, Attitude Stability	<p>Clawson Ch 5</p> <p>Iyengar, et al. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 22.</p> <p>Democrats Are Wrong About Republicans. Republicans Are Wrong About Democrats.</p>	Quiz
Week 9 10/23	Perception and Pluralistic Roots	<p>Glynn Ch 7</p> <p>Why Facts Don't Change People's Minds</p> <p>Key findings: Populace. The American Aspirations Index</p> <p>Nyhan, B. (2020). Facts and myths about misperceptions. <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 34(3).</p>	Quiz
Week 10 10/30	Framing and Group Effects	<p>Clawson, Ch 7</p> <p>Oxley, Z. (2020). Framing and political decision making: An overview.</p>	Quiz

Week 11 11/6	Knowledge, Interest, and Attention to Politics	Clawson Ch 8 Glynn Ch 9	Quiz
Week 12 11/13	What Americans Think About Our Expressed Values: Support for Civil Rights and Liberties	Clawson Ch 9 Clawson Ch 10	Quiz Final Paper Topic Due
Week 13 11/20	Trust in Government and Social Capital	Clawson Ch 11 Public Trust in Government: 1958-2022 Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital	Quiz
Week 14 11/27	Impact of Public Opinion on Politicians and Policy	Clawson 12 Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. <i>Political Science Quarterly</i> , 56(1).	Quiz
Week 15 12/4	What Do We Make of Public Opinion? What Should Our Role Be in Society?	Clawson Ch 13	Public Opinion Paper Due

Late Work

Late work may be submitted at any time before the last day of class for a 20% penalty.

TTU Policies

Texas Tech Policies on Religious Holy Days, ADA Support, Academic Integrity:
<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RequiredSyllabusStatements.php>

LGBTQIA support and connections & Title IX resources:
<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RecommendedSyllabusStatements.php>

Basic Needs

If at any time during the semester, you face challenges accessing regular food and housing and believe this may affect your performance in the course, you are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students for support, <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/>. If you are located at the Waco campus

you also have access to MCC's food pantry, <http://www.mclennan.edu/completion-center/food-pantry>. If you are located at the Lubbock campus, you have access to the TTU Food Pantry <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/foodpantry.php>. In addition, if you feel comfortable, please feel open to notifying me so that I can assist in connecting you with university and community resources specific to your area of needed support.