

Political Science 333: Public Opinion & Political Behavior

Monday/Wednesday 3:00-4:20PM

G028 Hubbard Hall

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Course Description and Objectives

In their purest form, democratic governments and policies purport to reflect “the will of the people.” But what exactly is the “will of the people?” Who are “the people?” How do we observe, measure, or record their “will?” What are the different possible forms of popular input into a democracy and which should we prioritize? How do different forms of popular participation and expressing opinion shape our concepts of popular consent? What is the current state of public opinion? How do our cultural, economic, or our immediate political environments inform or influence it? Does public opinion matter in a democracy? These are the questions we seek to answer in this course.

The goal of this class is three-fold:

1. For each student to become a discerning consumer of public opinion evidence, especially in regards to its common uses (and misuses) within normative and empirical arguments about politics and public policy.
2. For each student to become familiar with current methods and concerns in social scientific practices of measuring opinion.
3. For each student to possess a sufficient body of knowledge about the nature and influence of mass public opinion and popular preferences in Western democracies.

Course Materials

YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE THESE IN YOUR POSSESSION! The student bookstores might not have these yet, but Amazon or others do. All of these have paperback editions. You need one of either of the two most recent editions of each textbook.

- *American Public Opinion* Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin. 9th (or 8th) Edition. Pearson Longman.
- *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* Russell J. Dalton. 6th (or 5th) Edition. CQ Press.

- *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* Larry M. Bartels. 2008. Princeton University Press.

Online Materials: Additional required readings and resources will be assigned as noted on the syllabus. These readings will be available either through university-subscribed services (like JSTOR) or through the D2L course website as noted.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your final grade will be calculated from the following components:

Quizzes and Written Responses: 25 percent. Quizzes and written responses will assess your attention and interaction with the day's assigned reading material or class discussion. Quizzes will be given in class or on D2L (no makeups). Written responses require you to discuss or respond to a question using class material and will be assigned at the end of class and be due within the next week. You will have at least 10 quiz or written response opportunities (likely more), of which only your top 8 grades will be used to calculate your grade.

Participation in Class Survey Project: 10 percent. This is new. Pending IRB approval, our class is going to sample registered voters in East Lansing and survey their opinions prior to this November election. We will likely keep our focus on the proposal to institute a 1% income tax in East Lansing, a policy that will affect all of us who work or live in East Lansing. Your participation requirements are for you to work in a team of two knocking on doors, talking to a small number of residents (5-15), and using a smart phone to fill out the answers your respondent gives you. We will then calculate the results in class and perhaps even send it to the *State News*. If you are unable to participate then I will provide two alternative online lab assignments to earn this credit.

Midterm and Final Examinations: 65 Percent. Examinations will evaluate your knowledge of both book material and material discussed in class. In other words, you need to come to class to perform well on these examinations. Two midterms and a comprehensive final will be used to assess your knowledge of course material. From these three examinations, your two best grades will be used to formulate your grade. As a result, you need to take at least two exams to receive all possible points. You cannot "make up" an examination; if you miss a midterm exam you automatically receive a zero and your grade from the final examination will be used to calculate your overall grade. If the comprehensive final is counted as part of your grade, it will count for 35% of your total grade. If the two midterms are your two best grades, then I will weight the two grades equally.

Grading Scale:

100-94: 4.0
93-89: 3.5
88-83: 3.0
82-78: 2.5
77-73: 2.0

72-69: 1.5
68-65: 1.0
≤64: 0.0

Class Schedule

The schedule and reading assignments listed below are expectations; they are always open to change as additional readings may also be assigned. Chapters and pages are for the most recent edition of each book, with those from the prior edition listed in parentheses if different. Content from optional readings will be summarized and discussed in class; if you miss class, then you may want to read them.

August 30 Introductions & Syllabus

Sep 4 *No Class Labor Day*

Sep 6 Democratic Theory and Public Opinion

- Dalton pages 1-21 (1-18)
- Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee. 1954. "Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory." from *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. University of Chicago Press. On D2L.
- (Optional) Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. "From Democratic Theory to Democratic Practice: The Case for an Informed Citizenry." from *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. Yale University Press. On D2L.
- (Optional) Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1942. "The Classical Doctrine of Democracy" and "Another Theory of Democracy" from *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Harper and Brothers. On D2L.

I. DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

Sep 11 What is (or should be) Public Opinion? Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 1
- Converse, Philip E. 1987. "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. JSTOR link.
- (Optional) Ginsberg, Benjamin. 1982. "Polling and the Transformation of Public Opinion" APSA conference paper. On D2L.

Sep 13, 18 Participatory aspects of public opinion: voting, protest, and other forms of civic participation. Read:

- Dalton Chapters 3 & 4
- Clark, Peter B., and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*. JSTOR link
- (Optional) Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America" *PS: Political Science and Politics*. JSTOR link

Sep 20, 25 Polls as a measure of public opinion. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 2
- Sampling Error Worksheet. On D2L.
- Schumann, Howard and Stanley Presser. 1981. "The Attitude-Action Connection and the Issue of Gun Control." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. JSTOR link.

II. HOW PUBLIC OPINION IS ORGANIZED AND HOW IT OPERATES

Sep 27, Oct 2 Political Knowledge and Ideological Sophistication. Read:

- Dalton pages 21-36 (18-31)
- Delli-Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. "What Americans Know About Politics." from *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. Yale University Press. On D2L.
- Erikson & Tedin pages 55-80 (57-83)
- (Optional) Converse, Philip E. 1964 (2006). "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Critical Review*. Originally published in David E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Its Discontents* Free Press. ProQuest link.

Oct 4 Partisanship. Read:

- Dalton Chapter 9
- Erikson & Tedin the rest of Chapter 3
- (Optional) Campbell et al. 1960. "The Impact of Party Identification" from *The American Voter*. Wiley. On D2L.
- (Optional) Converse, Philip E. and Gregory B. Markus. 1979. "Plus ça change ..." *American Political Science Review*. JSTOR link.

Oct 9 Dynamics and Behavior of Aggregate Opinion. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin: Chapter 4 and "Who Are the Floating Voters?" pages 254-257 (264-267)
- Converse, Philip E. 1962. "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. JSTOR link.

III. SOURCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

Oct 11 Political Socialization. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 5
- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics*. JSTOR link.

- (Optional) Sears, David O. and Nicholas A. Valentino. 1997. "Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization." *American Political Science Review*. JSTOR link.

Oct 18 *First Midterm Exam: covering all material through political socialization.*

Oct 16, 23 Democratic Values and Evaluations of Democracy. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 6
- Dalton Chapters 5 (and 11, optional)
- p. 625-638 of Sullivan, John L. and John Transue. 1999. "The Psychological Underpinnings of Democracy" *Annual Review of Psychology*. On D2L.
- (Optional) McClosky, Herbert. 1964. "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics." *American Political Science Review*. JSTOR link.

Oct 25 "How much do we differ?" Group Differences in Opinion: Class, Gender, and Race. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 7
- Dalton Chapter 8

Oct 30 "How much do we differ?" Public Opinion, Culture Wars, and Inequality - An Introductory Discussion. Read:

- Bartels Chapters 1 & 2
- p. 1-27 from *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* by Thomas Frank. 2004. Metropolitan Books. Google Books or D2L

Nov 1 "How much do we differ?" Group Differences and Public Opinion: Religion and Income. Read:

- Bartels Chapter 3

Nov 6, 8 Identifications, Retrospective Evaluations, and Voting. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 9
- Dalton Chapters 10
- Bartels Chapter 4
- Page, Benjamin and David Brody. 1972. "Policy Voting and the Electoral Process: The Vietnam War Issue." *American Political Science Review*. JSTOR link.

Nov 13 Comparing American public opinion with other countries. Read:

- Dalton Chapter 6

- Introduction (p. 17-28) of *American Exceptionalism: A Double-edged Sword* by Seymour Martin Lipset. 1996. WW Norton. Google Books

Nov 15 Inequality & Egalitarianism Opinions in Practice. Read:

- Bartels Chapters 5-7

Nov 20, 22, 27 News Media, Social Media, and Public Opinion. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 8
- Zaller, John. 1998. "Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. JSTOR link.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Adam Simon. 1993. "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion." *Communication Research*. Sage Journals Online link.
- Gilliam, Franklin D. and Shanto Iyengar. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public." *American Journal of Political Science*. JSTOR link.
- Bond, Robert M. and co-authors. 2012. "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization" *Nature*. Nature link.
- (Optional) Hetherington, Mark J. 1996. "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." *American Journal of Political Science*. JSTOR link.

Nov 29 Politicians, Polls, and Political Representation and Responsiveness. Read:

- Dalton Chapter 11
- Erikson & Tedin Chapters 11 & 12
- Bartels Chapters 8-10
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *American Political Science Review*. JSTOR link.

Dec 4 *Second Midterm Exam: covering all material from democratic values and on.*

Dec 6 Wrap up, hand back second midterm, final review

Final Comprehensive Examination Monday, Dec 11; 3:00-5:00 PM; Covers all course material.

Class Policies

Missing Class and Late Work: Quizzes and exams cannot be made up if you miss class on that date. For other assignments, if you are unable to attend class, then it remains your responsibility to hand in any papers or assignment on the day it is due. Late work can be dropped off in my mailbox or emailed to me (please use .pdf format). Work that is not handed in by class-time is considered late. Late assignments will receive a 15% penalty if handed in before the next class, 30% if handed in two classes late, and no credit thereafter.

Course Communication: Course announcements will often be sent out via the email list provided by the registrar. It is your responsibility to make sure you can readily access any emails I send to your MSU email address. We will also try to utilize D2L's announcements when appropriate.

Grade Appeals: People make mistakes. If you think there is an error in your recorded grade, then you should first email the course teaching assistant. All concerns need to be emailed within one week of when the grade in question was posted or handed back, otherwise the posted grade cannot be revised. If the matter is not resolved by the course assistant, or if you have questions about how it was resolved, then you can contact me to discuss it.

The Spartan Honor Code and Academic Misconduct: Students are encouraged to take the Spartan Honor Code and need to learn about academic misconduct by visiting: <https://honorcode.msu.edu/>. Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Examples of misconduct include violating rules stated in this syllabus, cheating, plagiarism, and dishonesty. All of the work you hand in within this course is expected to be your own. If you work with others on an assignment, be sure that your answers present your own contributions and independent point of view. Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. Instances of cheating will be handled according the school's policy on integrity of scholarship and grades. For more information and a complete definition of academic misconduct see your student handbook's *General Student Regulation 1.00* at: <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/>.

Learning Needs: Any student who may need an accommodation because of any disability should contact MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (<http://rcpd.msu.edu/>) at 130 Bessey Hall within the first two weeks to provide me with information for proper accommodation. If you have any questions please feel free to contact them or ask me, all information and documentation will be kept confidential.

Final Caveat: This course hopefully will not deviate from what is written above, but I reserve the right to modify anything within it as I see needed to improve your learning experience.