

Political Science 316: Public Opinion and Political Participation

Instructor: Laura Bucci

Spring 2016

Instructor Information:

Location: Woodburn Hall 311, Tuesdays and Thursdays 5:45-7

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 9-11

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Course Overview

This course is a brief overview of the role of public opinion in American democracy. We hold attitudes about relative political and social groups, many of which shape our thoughts and actions. Further, if government is to be “by the people,” understanding what “the people” want is of major importance to legislators, organized groups, and interested political scientists. First we must examine several complex questions: What is public opinion? Where does it come from? How and when does it change? Does everyone’s opinion matter equally?

To answer these questions we will use scientific studies from political science and social psychology. We have two primary goals: First, students should gain a better understanding of the conditions under which attitudes form, as well as how they are expressed. Secondly, students should be better able to consume political data more critically, by designing and analyzing a survey.

Course Assignments

The best advice I can give anyone in how to succeed in this course is to come to class every day, ready and willing to ask questions about and discuss the assigned readings or to actively engage in the day's scheduled practicum. There will be a good bit of reading to do, but I hope that you will all complete all assigned readings and bring good questions and comments to class. This course culminates with your completion of a 4-5 page research paper using a survey that we will create as a class. The choices of topics are yours, though we will dedicate a good bit of class time to developing hypotheses and discussing the paper writing process.

Learning Objectives

At a minimum, upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- critically consume polling data;
- understand how opinions are measured;
- explain the tension between what Americans do and “should” know;
- present scholarly work in a manner that engages their classmates;
- articulate what Americans think about a variety of issues, and how these opinions may change over time;
- Explain how survey data are generated and can be analyzed

I expect each student to be able to speak and write intelligently about the readings we cover. However, you should aspire to not only master the material but to go beyond

it, drawing connections between all the different theories we examine, comparing them, critiquing the assumptions and empirical claims of authors, and applying theories to new sets of data.

Textbook

1. [The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion](#), by John R. Zaller. Cambridge University Press, 1992. ISBN: 0521407869
2. [Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy](#), by Diana C. Mutz. Cambridge University Press, 2006. ISBN: 0521612284
3. (Optional) [Survey Research Methods \(5th Edition\)](#), by Floyd J. Fowler, Jr. Sage Publications, Inc., 2013. ISBN: 978-1452259000

Grading

Participation/Discussion (20% of your grade): Learning lasts the longest when students are active and engaged in the classroom. It is important that you demonstrate you can think critically about the information presented, and to be able to speak respectfully about political topics to your classmates.

Participating in class is easy; participating well is difficult. In most cases, the quality of your comments will matter more than the quantity of your participation. Good participation requires three things: coming to class, doing the reading before class, and having thoughtful questions and contributions about the concepts we discuss. In any case, come to class and do the reading. Attendance is a necessary condition to participate in class.

You are allowed to miss two classes with no penalty, but all additional absences will be penalized, as you cannot participate in classes where you are not present.

5 Response Practica (4% each, 20% of your grade) On Thursdays throughout the semester you will be asked to do hands on work, or to have an open discussion. There are five questions where you should write a 2-3 page response due the following week.

Exams (a Midterm and Final, each 15%)

We will have two in class exams. Each will consist of 5 identification/significance/explanation questions (10 points each) and one long essay (50 points). In each section there will be choices, and will stem out of class material. Exams are not cumulative, however, information learned in the first half of the semester may inform what comes later.

Topic Presentation (10% of your grade)

Each of you will give a 5-7 minute presentation of the question you've been thinking about regarding Public Opinion. Ideally, the topic would relate to American politics. Those people worried about selecting their topic are welcome to come to my office hours. The presentation should contain five things: a central question, a theory, some way to test this theory, evidence you hope to collect, and survey questions that will help you answer this larger idea.

Presentation of Results: (10% of your grade)

A short presentation of your “top-line” results; 3-5 minutes long using our survey data. We will have ample in-class time dedicated to analyzing this data and preparing the presentations. By the time your results are finished, everyone in the class should already be familiar with your questions/hypotheses; this short presentation should just focus on your main findings.

Final Paper/Research Memo (10% of your grade)

This paper should be a maximum of 1000 words. Overall, write a 4-5 page summary of your presentations from earlier this semester. What was your central question? Your theory? Your test and the evidence you have? What survey questions were asked? Was there any way in which you believe that your questions could have had multiple interpretations or led respondents in differing directions?

Grade Scale and other important points

The grade scale for this course is as follows:

98.0+	= A+
93.0-97.9	= A
90.0-92.9	= A-
87.0-89.9	= B+
83.0-86.9	= B
80.0-82.9	= B-
77.0-79.9	= C+
73.0-76.9	= C
70.0-72.9	= C-
67.0-69.9	= D+
63.0-66.9	= D
60.0-62.9	= D-
Below 60	= F

Course Policies

Failure to adopt these principles could result in lowered grades, removal from the course, or disciplinary action. By remaining enrolled in this course you agree to:

- 1) Do your own work

Academic Integrity: As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the [*Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*](#) (*Code*). When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the *Code* will be handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities, and must include a report to the Dean of Students, who may impose additional disciplinary sanctions.

Re: Note Selling: Several commercial services have approached students regarding selling class notes/study guides to their classmates. Please be advised that selling a faculty member's notes/study guides individually or on behalf of one of these services using IU email, Canvas, or Oncourse violates both IU information technology and IU intellectual property policy. Selling the faculty member's notes/study guides to fellow students in this course is not permitted. Violations of this policy will be considered violations of the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* and will be reported to the Dean of Students as a violation of course rules (academic misconduct). Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment for which the notes/study guides are being sold, a reduction in your final course grade, a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities.

2) Be engaged in class

Lateness Coming to class late is disruptive to your classmates. Please arrive to class on time. If lateness becomes a problem, I reserve the right to count late students as absent.

Use of Cellphones The semester can be a fun time for everyone, but please keep cell phones away throughout class time. Texting and using the internet from your phone are not permitted.

Reading Expectations

Students are expected to complete the assigned reading before each class. Unless otherwise noted as "optional," all readings are required. I reserve the right to use "pop quizzes" to measure both attendance and keeping up with the readings. We will do a lot of work in small groups, so your active and cordial engagement with your peers is expected.

Taking Notes Not all material for class will be covered in slides. I suggest you bring a traditional spiral notebook to class. While many of you may think it's a good idea to take notes on your computer, I would discourage it, as the distraction capability of a computer is much larger than that of a piece of paper.

3) Contact me with problems.

Disability and Special Needs Accommodations

Please contact me by the third week of the semester to make the necessary arrangements. I will strictly follow the rules for disability support services established by the Office of Disability Services for Students (Room W302 in the Wells Library 006, 855-7578).

Email

Email is a form of professional communication, and you should adopt practices now that you will use in your future career. I tend to respond to emails fairly quickly, but if I have not addressed your question by the next class period, please ask me in person.

About grades

If you disagree with your grades on an assignment or would like to discuss it further, I would be happy to discuss it with you. If you would like me to adjust your grade, you need to explain why, and must approach me outside of normal class time.

Computer/Hard Drive Failure Policy

Given the proliferation of free "cloud" based storage and backup, there is no reason that a hard drive failure should render all of your work lost. One program, Box, is free and allows you to automatically backup your work to the cloud. I expect you to use a program like this and "computer errors" will not excuse missed/late assignments.

4) Be respectful to other students.

An Open Classroom: It is important to me that you leave this class better able to engage critically with political topics. However, there will be times in class, as there will be times in life, when not everyone agrees. It is important that you engage with your peers in a constructive manner, and derogatory comments will not be accepted. Interrupting speakers, attacking speakers personally, speaking aggressively, disregarding statements made by the instructor are all types of conduct that are unacceptable.

Office Hours:

Please contact me via email with any questions. My office hours are in Woodburn 311 on Tuesdays and Thursdays 9-11AM.

Course Overview:

The course is broken down into several parts: the basics of survey research and theories of public opinion; ways surveys may err; theories of partisan and ideological attachment; civic knowledge and political attitudes; polarization; and finally the role of inequality in representation.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Week 1: What is "public opinion" and why should we care?

January 12 Tuesday Introductions (to each other, to the course)

1. This syllabus.

January 14 Thursday Practicum :

Practicum Assignment: If you could ask a large number of IU students any question(s) what would they be and why?

Week 2: Falsifiable Hypotheses

January 19 Tuesday :

Due Practicum Write-Up 1: If you could ask a large number of IU students any question(s) what would they be and why?

1. Herbst (1993), "Numbered Voices...Chapter 3: Techniques of Opinion`Expression..."
2. Price (1992), "Public Opinion," Chapter 4: Conceptualizing Opinions.

January 21

Thursday Practicum: Developing a Falsifiable Hypothesis

1. (Optional) Fowler (2013), "Survey Research Methods," Chapter 1: Introduction
2. (Optional) Fowler (2008), "Survey Research Methods," Chapter 3: Sampling

Week 3: Designing Good Questions

January 26 Tuesday : Error Associated with Surveys

Due Practicum Write-Up 2: What is the theory behind the questions you would like to ask? What is your (falsifiable) hypothesis?

1. Weisberg (2005), "The Total Survey Error Approach," Chapter 2: Survey Error.
2. Squire (1988), "[Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed.](#)" Public Opinion Quarterly
3. (Optional) Fowler (2013), "Survey Research Methods," Chapter 2: Types of Error in Surveys
4. (Optional) Fowler (2013), "Survey Research Methods," Chapter 6: Designing Questions

January 28 Thursday Practicum: Questionnaire Design

1. (Optional) Fowler (2013), "Survey Research Methods," Chapter 7: Evaluating Survey Questions

Week 4 Responsible Research and Sensitive Questions

February 2 Tuesday: Responsibly Conducting Research

Guest Speaker (Indiana University IRB)

February 4 Thursday Practicum: Questions We Don't Want to Answer (Honestly)

Due Practicum Write-Up 3: Given your (revised?) hypothesis, what questions do you think you'd ask on our survey?

1. Berinsky (1999), "[The Two Faces of Public Opinion,](#)" AJPS.
2. (Optional) Fowler (2008), Survey Research Methods Chapter 4: Non Response

Week 5: Belief Systems

February 9 Tuesday : How Americans Organize Attitudes

1. Converse (1964) "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics."
2. Zaller & Feldman (1992), AJPS, "[A Simple Theory of the Survey Response.](#)"
3. Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996), What Americans Know About Politics... Intro., Ch.1-2

February 11 Thursday Practicum : Programming Web Surveys

By the end of this Class students will finalize their programming in Qualtrics

Week 6 Belief Systems II

February 16 Tuesday : Nature and Origins

1. Zaller (1992) The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion. Chapters 1-4.

February 18 Thursday Practicum : Programming Web Pilot Study with Qualtrics

Week 7 Belief Systems III

February 23 Tuesday : Nature and Origins

1. Zaller (1992) The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion. Chapters 5-8.

February 25 Thursday Practicum: Analyzing Web Pilot Study with Qualtrics

What questions do we have? How do we find patterns in our data?

Week 8 Topic Presentations / Survey Questions Due

March 1 Tuesday : Student Presentations

March 3 Thursday : Student Presentations II

Week 9 Midterm Exam

March 8 Tuesday : Student Presentations III

If Time Permits: I'll answer questions you have for the midterm.

March 10 Thursday : Midterm Exam

Week 10 Spring Break (Read Mutz when you're on a beach somewhere)

Week 11 Polarization and Democratic Participation

March 22 Tuesday : Exams Returned

Last Day for Changes to Survey

1. Mutz (2007), [Effects of "In-Your-Face" Television](#)
2. Mutz (2006) Hearing the Other Side. Chapters 1 & 2.

March 24 Thursday Class Discussion:

Survey Launches Today

1. Mutz (2006) Hearing the Other Side. Chapters 3-5.
2. Come to class prepared to discuss this question: What, if anything, do Mutz's findings mean for American politics?

Week 12: Partisanship

March 29 Tuesday:

Due Practicum Write-Up 4: What, if anything, do Mutz's findings mean for American politics?

1. Campbell et al. (1964) "The American Voter" Chapters 3, 6, & 7.

March 31 Thursday Class Discussion :

1. Green et al. (2004) "Partisan Hearts & Minds." Chapters 1 & 2.
2. Retrospective Voting in American Elections, Fiorina Chapter 2

Come to class prepared to discuss this question: Thinking about political partisanship, which of the three theories that we've discussed this week do you think is more accurate; why? Your written answer is due on April 7th.

Week 13: Inequality, The Spiral of Silence, and Whose Voice Matters

April 5 Tuesday: What do we think about Inequality

Due Practicum Write-Up 5: Thinking about political partisanship, which of the three theories that we discussed last week do you think is more accurate; why?

1. Larry Bartels “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind”
2. [Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2012. Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective. American Political Science Review 1-16.](#)
3. Jacobs, Lawrence and Benjamin Page. (2008) *Class War? What American Really Think about Economic Inequality*. Oxford U. Press. Ch.1

Thursday April 7: Does Inequality Impact Participation: How?

1. Schlozman, Kay Lehman Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. (1999). “Civic Participation and the Inequality Problem,” *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. Skocpol and Fiorina (New York: Russell Sage) Chap. 12.
2. Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, [Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens](#)

Week 14: Survey Data Analysis

April 12 Tuesday Practicum : Analyzing Our Survey with Qualtrics II
Work on your final presentations

April 14 Thursday : NO CLASS (MPSA)

Note: please use this time to work on your final presentations.

Week 15: Final Presentation Preparation / Little 5 Week

April 19 Tuesday Practicum : Analyzing Our Survey with Qualtrics II

Note: this time is dedicated for you to work on your final presentations.

April 21 Thursday Practicum: Finalizing our Findings

Note: this time is dedicated for you to work on your final presentations.

Week 16: Final Presentations

April 26 Tuesday : Final Presentations

April 28 Thursday : Final Presentations

April 29 Friday : Final Memo Uploaded to Canvas by 5:00pm

Final Exam: Exam Week