

**PSC 314**  
**PUBLIC OPINION & ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR**

Spring 2009  
Monday & Wednesday, 3:45-5:05pm  
HL 214

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**COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS**

In a democracy, the views and votes of citizens are expected to guide government activity and the creation of public policy. That makes public opinion and voting behavior central concerns in the study of democratic politics. In this course, we will endeavor to answer a variety of questions related to mass attitudes and electoral behavior: Where do political attitudes come from, and how much do people really know about politics, anyway? Do Katie Couric, Bill O'Reilly, and their media compadres influence public opinion? If so, how so? Why do some people vote, while others stay home and watch "The Hills"? For those of us who do go to the polls, how do we pick our candidate? Can political scientists' theories about voting behavior explain why Barack Obama beat John McCain? And finally, what is the connection between mass opinion and electoral outcomes, on one hand, and public policy outcomes, on the other? Does the government listen to the governed? The course will focus primarily on American politics, though we will also engage a smattering of readings comparative in nature.

In the end, the course has four goals:

- To help you understand how people form attitudes about political issues and events and translate those opinions into political action, such as voting
- To help you understand why sometimes public policy reflects the public's will, and sometimes it does not
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about political behavior, and to conduct an original research project yourself
- To help you become a savvy consumer of public opinion data, which the news media will continue to bombard you with for the rest of your life

**ATTENDANCE**

It is imperative that you attend class. We will monitor your attendance with that great American icon, the pop quiz. **Six** times throughout the semester, we will give a quiz consisting of one question about current events. If you are present for at least **four** of the quizzes, you will receive full credit for attendance. If you are present for fewer than four, **you will lose 5 points** on your final grade.

Correct answers to the quizzes will earn you bonus points: for each quiz you answer correctly, one-third of a point will be added to your final grade. For example, if you correctly answer all six quizzes throughout the semester, you will receive a 2-point bonus on your final average. If you think the attendance policy will be difficult for you to adhere to, drop this course. If you miss a quiz because of illness or another serious emergency, we can make other arrangements. But in such a case, you must let us know *immediately* of your absence.

## READINGS

There is one required textbook for this course, available at the University bookstore:

Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

In the course schedule below, it is referred to as “Clawson & Oxley.”

All of the other readings—mostly journal articles and book chapters—are available for download through our course’s Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>) or on reserve at Bird Library. You are also expected to keep up with current events by regularly reading a newspaper.

### Articles and Chapters

There are several assigned articles or book chapters for most weeks. A handful are freely available on the Internet, with the URLs in the course schedule below. The rest are posted on Blackboard (with the exception of one, which is on reserve at Bird Library—see the course schedule below). On the Blackboard page for this class, click the “Tools” button on the left-hand menu, and then click “Course Reserves.” There, you will find links to PDF versions of the readings. It will be your responsibility to download the items as they are assigned. It might be worthwhile to print the readings early in the semester, which will keep you from having to do this every week.

### The Newspaper

It should come as no surprise that you are expected to keep up with political news. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. Our discussions in class will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate a concept from lecture or a reading. Not only will regularly consuming the news bring course material to life, it will undoubtedly make the class more interesting. (And as a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

You are free to read (in print or online) any paper(s) of your choosing, with the following limitation. You need to choose a news source that includes frequent coverage of national politics. For that reason, *The Daily Orange*, fine publication that it is, does not count. The following are a few suggestions, any of which are excellent sources of political news:

*The New York Times*: [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com) (requires free online registration)

*The Wall Street Journal* [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com) (requires paid online subscription)

*The Los Angeles Times* [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)

*The Washington Post* [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) (requires free online registration)

## EVALUATION

Your grade in this class will be based on class attendance, an in-class midterm exam, a final exam, and a research paper. The breakdown is as follows:

- Attendance: 5%
- Midterm exam: 30%
- Final exam: 35%
- Research paper: 30%

### Exam Format

The midterm will consist of essay questions and short-answer identifications. The midterm will be taken in class on **March 4**, but we will hand out a list of possible essay questions one week earlier.

One of the questions will appear on the exam. The final will occur during the **final exam period**, with the specific date to be announced once the University makes the schedule available. It will also consist of short-answers and essay questions. The questions for the final will not be distributed in advance.

Makeup exams will be given only in extreme circumstances, such as the death of an immediate family member. We will be the final arbiters of what “extreme” means. If you miss an exam, it is your responsibility to notify us *immediately*.

### **Research Paper**

In addition to the two exams, you will conduct an original research project. For the assignment, you will both collect and analyze public opinion data about an issue. The specific topic will be of your choosing, but we will provide some guidelines for the paper within the first few weeks of the semester. We will also have an in-class “workshop” February 16 to give you some guidance on how to collect public opinion data from a variety of online sources. The paper is due in class on **April 1**. No fooling.

### **SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY**

Thinking about cheating? Don't do it. The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about my and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to me and review those accommodations with me. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>.

### **THOSE INDISPENSABLE CELL PHONES**

While I'm as big a fan as anyone of hearing Beyonce's “Single Ladies” as a ringtone—and it is a terrific song—the fact is that cell phones are a distraction. As a courtesy to me and your classmates, please turn off yours before entering class. If you don't, the rule is this: If your phone rings in class, I get to answer it and talk to whomever is on the line—whether it's your mother, brother, or that person you met at a bar last night. So leave it on at your own peril.

**COURSE SCHEDULE** (Note: This is subject to change as we proceed through the semester.)

**January 12:** Course introduction

**THE BASICS: CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION**

(January 14-21)

**January 14:** Defining and measuring public opinion: What is it, and how do we get hold of it?

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 1
- Key, V.O. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. pp. 3-18 (“Introduction”).

**January 19:** No class—Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday

**January 21:** Defining and measuring public opinion: What is it, and how do we get hold of it? (cont.)

- Clawson & Oxley, Appendix (pp. 349-358)
- Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 177-204 (Chapter 8, “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls”).
- Argh! Where did all the land lines go? (not required reading, but relevant)
  - <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/80/cell-only-voters-not-very-different>
  - <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/515/polling-cell-only-problem>
  - <http://people-press.org/report/391/the-impact-of-cell-onyms-on-public-opinion-polling>
  - <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/901/cell-phones-polling-election-2008>

**WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT? THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

(January 26-March 2)

**January 26:** Blame Mom and Dad: Socialization (and genes?)

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 2
- Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1968. “The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child.” *American Political Science Review* 62(1): 169-184.

**January 28-February 4:** Ideology, heuristics, and information

- Clawson & Oxley, Chs. 5, 7
- Converse, Philip E. 1964. “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” In David E. Apter (ed.) *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press. pp. 206-261. (Note: For copyright reasons, I can’t make this reading available through Blackboard. I have placed a hard copy of the book on reserve at the Bird Library. You must check it out and make a photocopy of the Converse chapter.)
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. “Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63-76.

- Gilens, Martin. 2001. "Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 95(2): 379-396.

**February 9:** Rationality and emotionality: Self-interest vs. "symbolic politics"

- Citrin, Jack, and Donald Philip Green. 1990. "The Self-Interest Motive in American Public Opinion." In Samuel Long (ed.), *Research in Micropolitics*, Volume 3. Greenwich: JAI Press. pp. 1-27.
- Sears, David O. 1993. "Symbolic Politics: A Socio-Psychological Theory." In Shanto Iyengar and William J. McGuire (eds.), *Explorations in Political Psychology*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 113-149.

**February 11:** Group interests and group identity: Race, ethnicity, and gender

- Clawson & Oxley, pp. 166-172, 255-266
- Kinder, Donald R., and Nicholas Winter. 2001. "Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(2): 439-453.

**February 16:** Collecting public opinion data: An in-class workshop

- Reading TBA

**February 18:** Group interests and group identity: Race, ethnicity, and gender (cont.)

- Uhlaner, Carole Jean, and F. Chris Garcia. 2002. "Latino Public Opinion." In Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), *Understanding Public Opinion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 77-101.

**February 23-March 2:** 90-pound weakling or 800-pound gorilla? Media effects on political attitudes

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 3
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 6-28.
- Page, Benjamin I., Robert Y. Shapiro, and Glenn R. Dempsey. 1987. "What Moves Public Opinion?" *American Political Science Review* 81(1): 23-44.
- Krosnick, Jon A. and Donald R. Kinder. 1990. "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming." *American Political Science Review* 84(2): 497-512.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1990. "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues: The Case of Poverty." *Political Behavior* 12(1): 19-40.
- \*Midterm exam essay questions handed out in class February 25\*

**March 4:** \*Midterm exam\*

**March 9-11:** Spring break—don't do anything I wouldn't.

**March 16-18:** Is there a culture war? Putting political polarization in perfectly proper perspective

- Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. 2008. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 563-588.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 70(2): 542-555.

### **TURNOUT, VOTE CHOICE, AND THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS**

(March 23-April 8)

**March 23-25:** Who votes, who doesn't, and why?

- Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rhode. 2006. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 Elections*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 79-106 (Chapter 6, "Who Voted?").
- Blais, Andre. 2006. "What Affects Voter Turnout?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 111-125.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2007. *Is Voting for Young People?* New York: Pearson Longman. pp. 95-126 (Chapter 4, "Where Have All the Young Voters Gone?")

**March 30-April 1:** Why do Americans vote the way they do?

- Niemi, Richard G., and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2001. "What Determines the Vote?" In Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg (eds.), *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 180-199
- Bartels, Larry M. 2000. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(1): 35-50.
- \*Research paper due in class April 1\*

**April 6-8:** The great persuader, or sound and fury signifying nothing? The effects of campaigns

- Glynn, Carroll J., Susan Herbst, Garrett J. O'Keefe, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Mark Lindeman. 2004. *Public Opinion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. pp. 439-475 ("Campaigning and Opinion Change").
- Zaller, John. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 252-278.
- Hillygus, D. Sunshine, and Todd G. Shields. 2008. *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. pp. 82-106 (Chapter 4, "Capturing Campaign Persuasion").

**IS THE GOVERNMENT LISTENING? SHOULD IT?**  
(April 13-27)

**April 13-27: Democratic responsiveness and the opinion-policy link**

- Clawson & Oxley, Chs. 11-12
- Gilens, Martin. 2005. "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(5): 778-796.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 295-324 (Chapter 9, "Dilemmas of Democracy").
- Hibbing, John, and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 129-159 (Chapter 6, "Americans' Desire for Stealth Democracy").
- Bartels, Larry M. 2008. "The Irrational Electorate." *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn. Available on-line at: [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=wq.essay&essay\\_id=478918](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=wq.essay&essay_id=478918) or [http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/how\\_stupid.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/how_stupid.pdf).

**Final exam period: \*Final exam\***

- Between April 30 and May 6. Specific date, time, and location to be announced.