

17.265: Public Opinion and American Democracy
Spring 2007
Wednesdays 11:30-2:30
E51-063

Professor:

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Welcome to Public Opinion and American Democracy. This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system. The course will emphasize both how citizens' thinking about politics is shaped and the role of public opinion in political campaigns, elections, and government. While the course will focus on research on the current state of public opinion, throughout the course we will also discuss historical developments in opinion and its place in politics, including changes that arose with the development of polling and with the advent of television and other electronic media. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion *should* play in American democracy.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to attend every class session. You are further expected to come prepared to discuss the issues raised in the readings. Please read the assigned materials *before class* on the date they are listed..

To meet the purpose of the course, you will be expected to both consume and digest readings from scholarly and journalistic sources. You are also expected to be aware of current events, especially relating to American politics. I highly recommend that you subscribe to and read a national newspaper, such as the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times*.

Each week, one-half of the class will be required to write a short essay responding to the week's readings, no longer than two single-spaced page. These essays should try to engage a number of the week's readings, by, for example, doing one or more of the following: juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations or approaches to a substantive topic; criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research; criticizing the conceptualization and/or measurement of a particular construct; analyzing the implications of a set of findings; suggesting new questions or hypotheses for research; developing similarities and contrasts with arguments or research found in the readings from previous weeks. More generally, *these papers should contain an argument, not a summary or description of the readings*. These papers should be distributed to instructors and class participants by 4:00 on the Monday before the scheduled Wednesday meeting. I will comment on them and turn

them back at the end of Wednesday's session. These essays will serve as the starting point for our discussion.

Students will also be required to write two papers for the class. A short critique of media polls will be due on March 7, 2007. A longer paper is due on the last scheduled day of class, May 16, 2007. This paper should review and interpret relevant literature and/or propose a research project. More details about these papers will follow later in the semester.

GRADING

Your grade will be determined as follows:

1. Participation: 35 percent: Regular attendance and participation in class discussion is required.
2. Weekly Papers: 25 percent
3. Short Paper: 10 percent.
4. Long Paper: 30 percent.

I expect that all papers will be turned in *on time*: no exceptions; no excuses. In addition, plagiarism is entirely unacceptable. Should you turn in a plagiarized paper, appropriate University sanctions will be pursued. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism, please talk to me. Finally, grades for your paper will be based on both substance and style. The papers will be graded on the quality of thought and analysis, the research you do, and the quality of writing. Use proper grammar, appropriate language and (please, please, please) proofread and spell-check the final copy of you paper before turning it in.

REQUIRED READING

There are 5 required books for this course, which are available at the Coop

1. Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, sixth edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press
2. Berinsky, Adam. 2004. *Silent Voices*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Fiorina, Morris. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Longman Press
4. Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
5. Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

COURSE SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE

February 7: Preliminaries

THE MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF PUBLIC OPINION

February 14: The Meaning of Public Opinion

Herbst, Susan. 1993. *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction, Chapter 3.

Key, V.O. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf. pp. 3-18.

Blumer, Herbert. 1948. "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling." *American Sociological Review* 13:542-554.

Converse, Philip. E. 1987. "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in The Political Process." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51/Supplement: 12-24

February 21: Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Collecting Data

Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, sixth edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, chapter 4-5

February 28: The Survey Interview and the Nature of the Survey Response

Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36:579-616 (J)

Tourangeau, Roger, Lance J. Rips, and Kenneth Rasinski. 2000. *The Psychology of Survey Response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Berinsky, Adam. 2004. *Silent Voices*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 1.

DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

March 7: Political knowledge, Sophistication, and Democratic Competence.

Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, sixth edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, chapter 2

Berinsky, Adam. 2004. *Silent Voices*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 2

Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Introduction and Chapters 2.

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 2, 3, 6.

March 14: Ideology and the Organization of Opinion.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter (ed.) *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.

Achen, Christopher H. 1975. "Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response." *American Political Science Review*. 69:1218-1231

Kinder, Donald R. 1983. "Diversity and Complexity in American Public Opinion." in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ada Finifter. Washington, DC: APSA Press.

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4, 5.

**BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP:
OPINION INGREDIENTS AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC PREFERENCES**

March 21: Self Interest (or symbolic politics?)

Sears, David O., Richard R. Lau, Tom Tyler and A.M. Allen Jr. 1980. "Self-Interest versus Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting." *American Political Science Review* 74: 670-684.

Green, Donald Philip and Jonathan A. Cowden. 1992. "Who Protests: Self-Interest and White Opposition to Busing." *The Journal of Politics* 54:471-496.

Cambell, Andrea. 2002. "Self-Interest, Social Security, and the Distinctive Participation Patterns of Senior Citizens." *American Political Science Review* 96: 565-574

April 4: Groups in American Politics: Us and Them.

Conover, Pamela J. 1984. "The Influence of Group Identifications on Political Perception and Evaluation." *The Journal of Politics* 46:760-784.

Kinder, Donald R. and Lynn M. Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. Chapter 5.

Sniderman, Paul M.; Thomas Piazza; Philip E. Tetlock; A. Kendrick. 1991. "The New Racism." *American Journal of Political Science* 35: 423-447.

Berinsky, Adam and Tali Mendelberg. 2005. "The Indirect Effects of Discredited Stereotypes: Social and Political Traits in Judgments of Jewish Leaders," *American Journal of Political Science* 49:4 845-864.

April 11: Core Values

Feldman, Stanley and John Zaller. 1992. "The Political Culture of Ambivalence." *American Journal of Political Science* 36: 268-307.

Chong, Dennis. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties," *American Journal of Political Science*, 37:867-99.

Fiorina, Morris. 2005. Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America, entire

SOCIETY AND POLITICS

April 18: Framing, Priming and Media Effects

Iyengar, Shanto, Peters, Mark, and Kinder, Donald R. 1982. "Experimental demonstration of the not-so-minimal consequences of television news programs." *American Political Science Review* 76: 848–858.

Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 5 and 6.

Philip H. Pollock III. Issues, Values, and Critical Moments' Did "Magic" Johnson Transform Public Opinion on AIDS ? *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 38, No. 2. (May, 1994), pp. 426-446.

Druckman, James. 2001. "The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence," *Political Behavior* 23: 225-256.

April 25: Collective Opinion and Representation

Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pages 1-82.

Bartels, Larry M. 1996. "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

May 2: Public Opinion and Public Policy

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

Stimson James A., Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89:543-565.

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. "Homer Gets A Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the Public Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3:0101, 15-31

May 9 Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Mueller, John. 1971. "Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam," *American Political Science Review* 65: 358-75.

Feaver, Peter D., Chris Gelpi, and Jason Reifler. 2005-6. "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." *International Security* 30(3): 7-46.

Berinsky, Adam and James Druckman. 2007. "Public Opinion Research, Presidential Rhetoric, and Support for the Iraq War." *Public Opinion Quarterly*,

Berinsky, Adam. 2007. "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and the American Public" *Journal of Politics*

Kull, Steven, Clay Ramsey, and Evin Lewis. 2003-4. "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War." *Political Science Quarterly* 118: 569-598.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

May 16: Conclusion. Public Opinion and American Democracy

Verba, Sidney. 1996. "The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 90:1-7.

Berelson, Bernard. 1950. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16: 313-330.

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 12

Berinsky, Adam J. *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Representation in America*, Conclusion.