

Political Science 230: Public Opinion and American Democracy

Fall Semester, 2014

Tuesday, Thursday 3-4pm

285 McNeil Building / Undergraduate Data Analysis Lab (UDAL) in 108 McNeil Building

Instructor

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-3pm

Course Description

This course examines public opinion in the American political system. We will discuss how to measure public opinion, how citizens formulate opinions, and the role of public opinion in campaigns, elections, and policymaking. The course will also investigate public opinion on a wide variety of topics, from immigration to abortion, as well as consider normative questions, including the role opinion *should* play in American democracy.

The course is designed to satisfy Penn's Quantitative Data Analysis (QDA) requirement for those who need it. Toward that end, students will be required to do a series of assignments involving the analysis of quantitative data on public opinion. Four homework exercises will instruct students on how to analyze survey data in order to answer substantive questions about American public opinion. Students will also write a term paper which requires them to analyze public opinion data to make their argument. For the purposes of the homework assignments and paper, the class will use the The American National Election Studies (ANES) public opinion survey from the 2012 presidential election. In addition to analyzing quantitative data on public opinion, students will also learn the basics of research design, hypothesis testing and causal inference, and use these skills to critique interpretations of public opinion.

The course has three learning objectives:

1. You will become a smart, cautious consumer of public opinion polls by understanding how surveys are conducted and how to interpret their results.
2. You will understand how individuals develop political preferences and how these preferences translate into survey responses and vote choice.
3. You will develop analytic skills that allow you to test important ideas in the social sciences.

Texts

New Directions in Public Opinion. 2012. Edited by Adam J. Berinsky. New York, Routledge Press.

Asher, Herbert. 2012. *Polling and the Public. What Every Citizen Should Know*. 8th edition. Washington D.C., CQ Press. (7th edition is also fine)

Pollock, Philip H. 2012. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. 4th Edition. Washington D.C., CQ Press.

Books are available at the Penn Bookstore (3601 Walnut St). In case you want to order the books online instead, readings from the required texts are available on the Canvas site for the lectures on Tuesday 9/2 and Thursday 9/4. One copy of each book is also on reserve at Rosengarten Reserves in Van Pelt. Articles and book chapters that are not in one of the books listed above are available on the course Canvas site under Files/Readings/Appropriate Lecture and Date

A note on the readings: Many of the readings from class come from political science journals and books, and as such, are rather dense and technical. You are not responsible for the arcane details and the methods. Instead, focus on the big picture ideas and theories, that is what counts here. Also, in your first section you will cover the basics of how to read a quantitative social science article.

Canvas

I will use the Canvas website for this course. So be sure to check the site regularly. All readings (except for the required books), assignments, data, and helpful information about Stata will be made available on the site.

Requirements

This course combines both substantive theories and research about public opinion as well as an introduction to quantitative data analysis for the social sciences. As such, the expectations and assignments for this course may differ slightly from other political science courses you have taken.

First, all students are expected to attend classes and participate in class discussions. In order to facilitate discussion, you should come to class having completed the readings *in advance* of the class meetings. The TA will take attendance in both lecture and section. Regular contributions to class discussion are expected and are a component of your grade. If it becomes apparent that students are not completing the assigned readings, I will start giving reading quizzes that will be part of your participation grade.

Second, the course will include 4 homework assignments that ask you to analyze and interpret public opinion data. These exercises will prepare you to write a longer paper that requires

you to do your own original analysis using public opinion data.

Third, all students are required to write a term paper that not only draws on the theories and main ideas from the class, but also uses original data analysis to answer a question related to public opinion.

Fourth, there will be a cumulative final exam covering class readings and discussions. The exam will not require data analysis, but instead will focus on the main theories, ideas, and findings that come from the public opinion literature. Further, the exam will not require you to have memorized public opinion polling numbers, although I will often present these statistics in lecture in order to illustrate a point.

A note on the requirements: Students must complete all assignments to pass the class even though a student may be able to pass the class numerically without completing all of the assignments.

Grading breakdown

- Four homework assignments: 40% (10% each)
- Original data analysis paper: 20%
- Final exam: 30%
- Class attendance and participation: 10%

If you would like to appeal a grade, you must do so in writing within two weeks of the assignment being handed back. In your appeal, you must respond to the TA's comments or areas where points were taken off and justify why you think additional points are appropriate.

Due dates, late policy, and conflicts

Homework assignments:

- Assignment #1: Thursday, 9/18
- Assignment #2: Tuesday, 10/14
- Assignment #3: Thursday, 10/30
- Assignment #4: Thursday, 11/20

Original data analysis paper: 12/9

Final exam: Currently scheduled for Tuesday, December 16 from 12pm - 2pm

Homework assignments and the original data analysis paper are due at 3pm (aka the beginning of class) on the dates above. Any late work will be docked one-half letter grade per

day late. So if an assignment is submitted at 3:01pm, then that assignment will be docked ½ letter grade (so an A assignment becomes an A-, an A- becomes a B+, etc.).

Assignments must be printed out by the student and handed in. **Electronic copies will not be accepted.** If you e-mail your assignment in by 3pm and do not submit a hardcopy, then the assignment will be considered late and will be docked accordingly until you submit a printed copy. If you won't be in class on the day an assignment is due and you do not have a friend you trust to submit the assignment on your behalf, then the paper must be delivered before 2:50pm on the due date to my mailbox in 217 Stiteler Hall.

All the assignment dates are above, so please let me know within the first two weeks of class if you have excused absences, such as Penn sporting events and religious holidays, that conflict with the deadlines.

Data analysis using STATA

This course includes lab time and assignments that require quantitative data analysis. We will be using Stata in the lab. If you are familiar with other statistical programs, such as SAS or R, you may do your assignments in a different program; however, the TA and I will only help with computational problems related to Stata. If you decide to complete your assignments in another program and have problems, you are on your own.

Stata is available on computers all over campus. http://www.library.upenn.edu/computing/laptops_labs.html lists the computers that have Stata in the various libraries on campus and http://www.sas.upenn.edu/computing/teaching_resources/computer_labs provides information on the SAS computer labs. You may only use the SAS computer labs when they are not reserved, so be sure to check the schedule before heading over to one of these labs.

If you would like to purchase Stata to have it on your laptop or desktop, students receive a discount. You can find more information here: <http://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/gradplans/campus-gradplan/>. For the purposes of this class, you cannot use Small Stata. You must purchase Stata/IC. **NOTE: There is no expectation that you purchase your own copy of Stata for this class. There are computers all over campus that have Stata.** I will post helpful Stata links on the Canvas site.

We will be using the 2012 ANES data throughout the course. The data file and codebook are available on the Canvas website under (Files/ANES data)

Academic honesty

Students are bound to uphold the Code of Academic Integrity. The code prohibits activities that “have the effect of intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student’s performance.” Students are responsible for fully adhering to the code; the details can be found online at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity>. Please note that ignorance of these guidelines is no excuse for failure to comply with them.

Schedule

Thursday, August 28: Introduction

Tuesday, September 2: What is public opinion?

1) What is public opinion? 2) What are the different views about the role of public opinion in a democratic system? 3) How has public opinion changed over time? 4) How do opinions form?

Reading

Herbst, Susan. "The History and Meaning of Public Opinion." In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 19-31). Available on Canvas.

Key, V.O. 1961. Chapter 1: "Introduction." In *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf Press. (pp. 3-18). Available on Canvas.

Zaller, John. 1992. Chapter 3: "How Citizens Acquire Information and Convert it to Public Opinion." In *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 40-52). Available on Canvas.

Thursday, September 4: Measuring public opinion with surveys

1) How do survey researchers measure public opinion? 2) How much should we trust polls? 3) Why should we be concerned about the sample in the survey? 4) Is there an ideal method of collecting public opinion data?

Reading

Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Practice of Survey Research. Changes and Challenges." In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 32-51).

Asher, Herbert. Chapter 5: "Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures." In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (pp. 117-136).

Keeter, Scott, Courtney Kennedy, Michael Dimock, Jonathan Best, and Peyton Craighill. 2006. "Gauging the Impact of Growing Nonresponse on Estimates from a National RDD Telephone Survey." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70(5): 759-779. Available on Canvas.

Christian, Leah, Scott Keeter, Kristen Purcell, and Aaron Smith. 2010. "Assessing the Cell Phone Challenge." *Pew Research Center*. Available on Canvas.

ANES. 2012. Codebook section 3 on Sample Design (pp. 20-27) and section 4 on Data Collection (pp. 28-30). Available on Canvas (under Files/ANES Data/ANES 2012 Codebook).

Tuesday, September 9: Measuring public opinion with surveys (continued)

1) What are "nonattitudes" and should we be concerned? 2) How can question ordering and question wording affect polls? 3) How should pollsters present results?

Reading

Asher, Herbert. Chapter 2: "The Problem of Nonattitudes" In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (pp. 37-60).

Asher, Herbert. Chapter 3: “Wording and Context of Questions” In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (pp. 63-90).

Asher, Herbert. Chapter 8: “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls” In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (pp. 205-236).

Thursday, September 11: LAB – MEET IN UDAL

In lab we will cover the basics of data organization and analysis.

The first problem set will be handed out at the end of class on Thursday, September 11th. A paper copy of the problem set is due at 3pm on Thursday 9/18.

Reading

Pollock, Philip. III. Chapter 2: “Measuring and Describing Variables.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. (pp. 28-44).

Tuesday, September 16: Political knowledge and citizen competence

1) How much do Americans know about politics? 2) Do Americans have strong and stable beliefs about issues? 3) In what ways is low political knowledge problematic for democracy? 4) What is the “miracle of aggregation”? 5) Why might there be great instability in opinion at the individual level, but stability at the aggregate level?

Reading

Delli Carpini, Michael. X. 2005. “An Overview of the State of Citizens’ Knowledge about Politics.” Annenberg School for Communication. Departmental Papers. (pp. 27-40). Available on Canvas.

Gilens, Martin. “Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 52-76).

Page and Shapiro. Chapter 2: “The Myth of Capricious Change.” In *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences*. (pp. 37-52). Available on Canvas.

Thursday, September 18: Political knowledge and citizen competence (continued)

PROBLEM SET #1 DUE AT 3PM

1) In what ways can cues and heuristics allow voters to make informed judgements without much knowledge? 2) What is “low information rationality”? 3) What are the limits of heuristics?

Reading

Lupia, Arthur. 1994. “Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63-76. Available on Canvas.

Kuklinski, James H., and Paul J. Quirk 2000. “Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion.” In Arthur Lupia, Matthew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin (eds.), *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*

New York: Cambridge University Press (pp. 153-182). Available on Canvas.

Tuesday, September 23: The sources of public opinion: socialization

1) How does an individual *become* a political person? 2) How do parents influence the political outlook of their children? 3) How do other contextual influences influence the development of (and changes to) political attitudes? 4) What are “period”, “generational/cohort”, and “age” effects? 5) What are the competing theories explaining when in life political attitudes are most likely to change?

Reading

Sears, David O. 1983. “The Persistence of Early Political Predispositions” *Review of Personality and Social Psychology* 4: 79-110. Available on Canvas.

Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. “Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined.” *Journal of Politics*. 71(3): 782-799. Available on Canvas.

Sears, David O., and Nicholas A. Valentino. 1997. “Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization.” *American Political Science Review* 91(1): 45-65. Available on Canvas.

Cox, Amanda. July 7, 2014. “How Birth Year Influences Political Views.” The Upshot. *New York Times*. Link to article available on Canvas.

Thursday, September 25: Sources of public opinion: The role of self-interest and symbols (economics or emotions)

1) How often do people base political attitudes on their self-interest? 2) What is “symbolic politics”? 3) What is “pocketbook voting”? 4) When does self-interest work? 4) How are political information and self-interest related in public opinion? 5) What types of issues lend itself to self-interest versus symbolic politics?

Reading

Sears, David O. and Carolyn L. Funk. 1990. “Self-Interest in Americans’ Political Opinions.” In Jane I. Mansbridge (ed.), *Beyond Self Interest* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 147-170). Available on Canvas.

Sears, David O., Richard R. Lau, Tom R. Tyler, and Harris M. Allen, Jr. 1980. “Self-Interest vs. Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 74(3): 670-684. Available on Canvas.

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind.” *Perspective on Politics* 3(1): 15-31. Available on Canvas.

Tuesday September 30th and Thursday, October 2: LAB – MEET IN UDAL

In the lab we will learn how to describe relationships using cross-tabulation, graphs, and correlation coefficients.

The second problem set will be handed out at the end of class on Thursday. A paper copy

of the problem set is due at 3pm on Tuesday 10/14.

Reading

Pollock, Philip. III. Chapter 3: “Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses, and Making Comparisons” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis* (pp. 48-63).

Pollock, Philip. III. Chapter 4: “Intro” (pp. 78-80), “Controlled Comparisons” (pp. 84-86), and “Three Scenarios” (pp. 86-97). In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*

Pollock, Philip. III. Chapter 5: “Making Controlled Comparisons” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis* (pp. 102-118).

Tuesday, October 7: Sources of public opinion: Group identities

1) What is “group consciousness”? 2) How does group identification affect what issues matter to a person and what policy stance a person takes?

Reading

Junn, Jane. Tali Mendelberg, and Erica Czaja. “Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 119-138).

Conover, Pamela. 1984. “The Influence of Group Identities on Political Perception and Evaluation.” *Journal of Politics* 46(3): 760-785. Available on Canvas.

Thursday, October 9: No class – Fall break

Tuesday, October 14: Sources of public opinion: Group identities (continued)

PROBLEM SET #2 DUE AT 3PM

1) How are individuals’ identities (for example, race, gender, and religion) correspond with their political attitudes?

Reading

Burns, Nancy and Don Kinder. “Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 139-167).

Campbell, David E, Geoffrey C. Layman, and John C. Green. “A Jump to the Right, a Step to the Left. Religion and Public Opinion.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 168-192).

Kinder, Donald and Nicholas Winter. 2001. “Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(2): 439-456. Available on Canvas.

Thursday, October 16: Sources of public opinion: Group identities (continued)

1) How do other people’s identities (race in the Brader article and religion in the Campbell article) affect opinions?

Reading

Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. “What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(4): 959-978. Available on Canvas.

David E. Campbell, John C. Green, and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2011. "The Party Faithful: Partisan Images, Candidate Religion, and the Electoral Impact of Party Identification." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(1): 42-58. Available on Canvas.

Tuesday, October 21st and Thursday, October 23: LAB – MEET IN UDAL

In the lab we will learn about correlations, statistical significance, and how to make inferences about the relationship between two variables.

The third problem set will be handed out at the end of class on Thursday. A paper copy of the problem set is due at 3pm on Thursday 10/30.

Reading

Pollock, Philip. III. Section: "Statistical Significance" In Chapter 7: "Tests of Significance and Measures of Association" In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. (pp. 155-169).

Pollock, Philip. III. Section: "Correlation" In Chapter 8: "Correlation and Linear Regression" In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. (pp. 183-187).

Tuesday, October 28: Sources of public opinion: Emotions and Personality

1) How do emotions affect opinion formation and political participation? 2) What is the "Big Five"? 3) Are we born with specific political attitudes? 4) How does our personality relate to political opinion?

Reading

Brader, Ted. "The Emotional Foundations of Democratic Citizenship." In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 193-216).

Mondak, Jeffrey J. and Matthew V. Hibbing. "Personality and Public Opinion." In *New Directions in Public Opinion* (pp. 217-238).

Thursday, October 30: Media effects

PROBLEM SET #3 DUE

1) What are the different kinds of effects the media can have? 2) What factors determine when a media message will affect us? 3) Are we prisoners of the media?

Reading

Nelson, Thomas, Rosalee Clawson, and Zoe Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review* 91(3): 567-583. Available on Canvas.

Druckman, Jaime N. 2001. "On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?" *Journal of Politics* 63(4): 1041-1066. Available on Canvas.

Tuesday, November 4: Media effects (continued)

1) What is “new media” and “soft news”? 2) How have additional media choices affected media’s influence? 3) How and why do Arceneaux and Johnson’s findings differ from Levendusky’s?

Reading

Baum, Matthew. “Media, Public Opinion, and Presidential Leadership.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion*. (pp. 258-270).

Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. Chapter 4: “Partisan News and Mass Polarization.” In *Changing Minds or Changing Channels?* Chicago: Chicago University Press. (pp. 70-90). Available on Canvas.

Levendusky, Matthew. 2013. Chapter 4: “Can the Partisan Media Polarize?” In *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. (pp. 66-91). Available on Canvas.

Thursday, November 6: Are we really polarized?

1) What is polarization? 2) Does polarization exist in the United States? 3) How does the popularity of new media (discussed in Arceneaux & Johnson (2013) and Levendusky (2013) in the reading from November 4th) relate to the polarization debate in these readings below? 4) How does Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) conceptualize polarization, and how is it distinct from the other authors?

Reading

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2010. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4. In *Culture War? The Myth of Polarized America*. (pp. 1-50). Available on Canvas.

Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders. 2008. “Is Polarization a Myth?” *Journal of Politics* 70(2): 542-555. Available on Canvas.

Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. 2012. “Affect, Not Ideology A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3): 405-431. Available on Canvas.

Tuesday, November 11 and Thursday, November 13: LAB – MEET IN UDAL

In the lab we will learn how to use regression analysis to estimate the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable.

The fourth problem set will be handed out at the end of class on Thursday. A paper copy of the problem set is due at 3pm on Thursday 11/20.

Reading

Pollock, Philip. III. Chapter 8: “Correlation and Linear Regression” Beginning with section “Bivariate Regression” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. (pp. 187-206).

Tuesday, November 18: Macro opinion over time

1) What do Americans want from the government, and how do these preferences change over time? 2) What is issue evolution? 3) What are the main causes of collective public opinion change?

Reading

Stimson, James. 2004. Chapter 2: “What the Public Wants from Government” In *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (pp. 23-57). New York: Cambridge University Press. Available on Canvas.

Stimson, James. 2004. Chapter 3 “Left and Right Movements in Preference” In *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (pp. 57-95). New York: Cambridge University Press. Available on Canvas.

Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. Chapter 8: “The Causes of Collective Opinion Change” In *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’* (pp. 321-354). Available on Canvas.

Pew Center 2012. “Trends in American Values: 1987-2012.” <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/06-04-12%20Values%20Release.pdf> SKIM ONLY! Available on Canvas.

Thursday, November 20: Choosing a candidate

PROBLEM SET #4 DUE AT 3PM

1) In what ways are elections predictable? 2) What are (and are not) predictors of vote choice?

Reading

Sides, John and Jake Haselswerdt. “Campaigns and Elections.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion*. pp. 241-257.

Lewis-Beck, Michael et al. 2009. Chapter 13: “Economic Antecedents of Political Behavior. In *The American Voter Revisited*. ” Ann Arbor, MIL University of Michigan Press. (pp. 365-377).

Hayes, Danny. 2009. “Has Television Personalized Voting Behavior?” *Political Behavior* 31: 231-260.

“Exit Polls 2012: How the Vote has Shifted.” November 6, 2012. *Washington Post* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/2012-exit-polls/> Link available on Canvas.

Tuesday, November 25: Class Cancelled

Thursday, November 27: No class – Thanksgiving

Tuesday, December 2: Do our elected officials listen to us? Who do they listen to?

1) Are citizens’ views well represented in policy? 2) Whose opinions are listened to? 3) On what issues are elected officials especially responsive or nonresponsive? 4) Should elected officials always listen to public opinion?

Reading

Campbell, Andrea L. “Public Opinion and Public Policy.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion*. pp. 271-291.

Jacobs, Lawrence and Benjamin I. Page. 2005. “Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?” *American Political Science Review*. 99(1): 107-123. Available on Canvas.

Gilens, Martin. 2005. "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(5): 778-96. Available on Canvas.

Thursday, December 4: Do we lead or follow on public opinion?

1) Do voters lead or follow on opinions about policy? 2) If voters don't judge candidates on policy, on what do they judge candidates?

Reading

Lenz, Gabriel. 2012. Chapter 3: "Rewarding Policy Advantages? Priming Policy." In *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Politics and Performance*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. (pp. 54-87). Available on Canvas.

Lenz, Gabriel. 2012. Chapter 4: "Changing Views, Changing Votes? Performance versus Policy." In *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Politics and Performance*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. (pp. 88-107). Available on Canvas.

Tuesday, December 9: Wrap-up

Reading

Sears, David O. "Conclusion. Assessing Continuity and Change." *New Directions in Public Opinion*. (pp. 292-310).

Asher, Herbert. 2001. Chapter 9: "Polling and Democracy" In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (pp. 237-251).