



# Topics in Public Opinion

POLS 234  
The University of Vermont  
Spring 2015  
Tu Th 2:30-3:45 PM  
Old Mill Annex, A-500

## Contact Information

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:15-11:15 AM, again from 1:15-2:15 PM, and by appointment.

## Course Description

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This course will examine public opinion and mass political behavior in the United States, with a special emphasis on environmental issues. Among the topics to be explored are the ways in which ordinary citizens make sense of their political world, the quality and sophistication of public opinion, the interplay between mass attitudes and public policy, and the motivations that underlie political participation and electoral choice.

## Course Requirements

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Our emphasis throughout the semester will be on critical thinking and the development of strong, analytical writing skills. Graded assignments are designed to evaluate your growth in these areas. Assignments are also designed to give you many opportunities, using different skills, to build a strong grade in this course.

1. Your attendance and active participation is *essential* to the effectiveness of this class. It will account for 25% of your final score. Please know that I reserve the right to give occasional pop-quizzes if it appears that students are ill-prepared for class.
2. Two essay-based exams will be administered in class, each worth 25% of your final grade. The first will be on Thursday, February 26, and the second on Tuesday, April 21.
3. The remainder of your grade—25%—will be determined by a 10-page research paper on public attitudes toward an issue of your choice (for instance: capital punishment, the war on terror, abortion, etc.). While this project is due at the end of term—no later than 1:30 PM on Thursday, May 7—I will ask you to follow your topic throughout the semester and relate it to the broader subjects we discuss in class. Further details will follow shortly in the form of a separate handout.

## Required Reading

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The following books are required reading for this course:

- Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin, American Public Opinion, 8<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Pearson Longman (2011).

ISBN: 0-205-74543-1

- Herbert Asher, Polling and the Public, 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (2011).

ISBN: 978-1-60426-606-1978 (NOTE: This title is also available for free through Google books)

All remaining assignments are available on our class website, under the heading "Calendar," at:

[http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS234/Spring\\_2015](http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS234/Spring_2015)

Occasionally (and for a variety of reasons), I may decide to substitute one reading assignment for another. If that happens, I will make an announcement in class in advance of the day in question and place the new article online in place of the former. When in doubt, our class website will take precedence over the paper copy you receive at the start of term.

## Grading Standards

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The grades I assign to written work are based on the following criteria:

- **Excellent (A range):** Grades in the "A" range are reserved for work that is *superior* in quality. "A" essays are lively, interesting, and intellectually sophisticated. The writer develops a clear and creative thesis, and supports their argument with solid and persuasive evidence. The paper itself is polished and beautifully written, free of grammatical and typographical errors. Above all, "A" essays reflect originality. The writer's own voice and logic are present on the page.
- **Good (B range):** Grades in the "B" range reflect work that is *good to very good* in quality. The essay completes all of the requirements of the assignment at hand. It may have minor errors and flaws, but the foundation of the work is solid, clear, and reasonably well-organized. "B" essays address topics in a thoughtful way, but offer less insight and originality than "A" essays.
- **Fair (C range):** A "C" essay represents work that is *satisfactory* in quality. The writer offers a thesis, but it is usually too broad, or too vague. The essay tends to make assertions without offering specific examples or supporting evidence from class lectures, discussions, and reading assignments. The overall impression of the paper is that of a rough draft. More effort at revision is encouraged and spelling and grammatical errors often require correction.
- **Poor (D range):** "D" work is *unsatisfactory*. It is sloppy, incoherent and poorly written, marred by mechanical faults (e.g., errors in grammar, punctuation, and

spelling), and/or factual errors. The writer has difficulty developing an idea, and holding a paragraph together. The thesis of the paper—that is, what the paper is arguing—is usually absent or incomplete.

- **Failing (F):** A *failing* grade is given for work that is exceedingly poor, cannot be understood, or has little relevance to the course.
- **No Credit (0):** A grade of “zero” is given for any work that is not completed in full.

Please note that I will reduce grades on late papers by one-third of one letter grade per day. In other words, a paper received one day late will (at most) receive an A-, two days late a B+, three days late a B, and so on. This policy counts *calendar* days, not class days.

Work that is produced by cheating, collaboration, plagiarism or other violations of academic honesty will be subject to the disciplinary actions described in the UVM student handbook.

## Discussion Questions

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Discussion questions inspired by the reading assignments are posted on our class website and should be reviewed prior to each class.

## Class Attendance

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Class attendance accounts for 10% of your final grade in this class. It is recorded by your signature on the attendance sheets passed around in class each day. All students receive two “free” absences to use as they see fit (without need for excuse), but these absences are intended for illness and emergencies and should be saved for such. Once they are gone, they are gone. Note that 10 points will be deducted from your attendance grade for each class you miss in addition. In other words, if you miss class frequently it is possible for your score to fall into negative numbers.

You need also to be aware of the following:

- You are solely responsible for making sure you sign the attendance sheet before leaving class. If you do not, your name cannot be added at a later point.
- Any student involved in the forgery of signatures—either on the “giving” or “receiving” end—will receive an automatic zero for that entire portion of their grade, and will in addition be subject to the university’s policy on academic honesty.
- Beyond the two “free” absences described above, I do not grant excused absences unless the circumstances are exceptional, or you travel out of town as a member of a UVM club or sports team. If you are a member of a sports team, please be sure to forward a copy of your schedule to me in writing as soon as it becomes available, so that attendance sheets can be marked accordingly on those days when your team travels out of town.

## Religious Holidays

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Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Please submit your documented religious holiday schedule for the semester to me by the end of the second full week of classes. Students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance will be permitted to make up that work.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

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If you have a physical or learning disability, please come by my office *within the first two weeks of class* so that we can consult with the ACCESS office to determine an appropriate accommodation for your needs. It is important that you consult with me early in the semester. It may not be possible for me to provide an accommodation if I am informed of the request less than three days before an assignment is due.

## Classroom Protocol

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In coordination with the Department of Political Science, I have adopted the following protocol for classroom behavior:

- 1) Students are expected to attend and be prepared for *all* regularly scheduled classes. Attendance will be taken and will count toward your final grade.
- 2) Students are expected to arrive on time and stay in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that he or she will need to leave early, he or she must notify the instructor before the class period begins.
- 3) Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt class by leaving and reentering during class, must not distract class by making noise, and must be attentive to comments being made by the instructors and by peers.
- 4) Students must turn off and stow *all* electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, iPods, etc.) prior to the start of class. Those who wish to use a laptop for taking notes must first ask permission.
- 5) Behavior that departs from these guidelines as well as any additional guidelines specific to the individual course is not acceptable and may be cause for disciplinary action.

Students in serious violation of any of these rules may be subject to whatever *grade penalty* I deem appropriate.

## Asking for Help

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Be sure to ask questions whenever you need to. Here is how:

- I am generally available to answer quick questions both before and after class.

- I hold office hours on a first-come, first-serve basis every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:15-11:15 AM and again from 1:15-2:15 PM. If those hours are not compatible with your schedule, please do not hesitate to ask for an appointment. My office is located on the 5th floor of Old Mill, room 519.
- While you can reach me by telephone at (802) 656-4062, e-mail is generally faster. I check e-mail on a regular basis, but please understand that I may not be able to respond immediately to messages sent in the evening or on weekends. My e-mail address is: Deborah.Guber@uvm.edu

## Class Calendar

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*"We are all captives of the pictures in our head, our belief that the world we experience is the world that really exists."*

—Walter Lippmann

### I. MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

**Tuesday, January 13:** *Introductory Remarks*

- No reading assignment.

**Thursday, January 15:** *Public Opinion and the Classical Tradition*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 1 (sections 1-2).
- Walter Lippmann, "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." In, Public Opinion (1922): 3-32.
- James Bryce, "The Nature of Public Opinion." In, Morris Janowitz and Paul M. Hirsch, eds., Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication (1981): 3-9.
- A. Lawrence Lowell, "Public Opinion." In, Morris Janowitz and Paul M. Hirsch, eds. Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication (1981): 10-16.

**Tuesday, January 20:** *Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 1 (sections 3-7).
- Herbert Blumer, "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling," American Sociological Review, 13 (1948): 542-549.
- Philip E. Converse, "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process," Public Opinion Quarterly, 52 (1987): S12-S24.

- Adam J. Berinsky, "The Two Faces of Public Opinion," American Journal of Political Science, 43 (October 1999): 1209-1230.

**Thursday, January 22:** *A Primer on Survey Research*

- Asher (2011): Chapters 1-5.
- John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences," American Journal of Political Science, 36 (August 1992): 579-616.

**Tuesday, January 27:** *The Use (and Abuse) of Polls*

- Asher (2011): Chapters 6-9.

**Thursday, January 29:** *Beyond Numbers: The Quantitative-Qualitative Debate*

- Jennifer L. Hochschild, What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice (1981): Chapters 1-3, 8.
- Stanley Feldman and John Zaller, "The Political Culture of Ambivalence," American Journal of Political Science, 36 (1992): 268-307.
- James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin, "Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal: Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion," Acta Politica, 40 (2005): 284-298.

## II. SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

**Tuesday, February 3:** *Agents of Socialization*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 5.
- Richard G. Niemi and Mary A. Hepburn, "The Rebirth of Political Socialization," Perspectives on Political Science, 24 (1995): 7-16.
- Edgar Litt, "Civic Education, Community Norms, and Political Indoctrination," American Sociological Review, 28 (1963): 69-75.

**Thursday, February 5:** *Political Knowledge*

- Walter Lippmann, "The Phantom Public." In, The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Edited by Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd (2007): 383-387.
- Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, "Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting First Things First," American Journal of Political Science, 37 (November 1993): 1179-1206.
- James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich, "Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship," Journal of Politics, 62 (August 2000): 790-816.

**Tuesday, February 10:** *Anxiety and Emotion*

- Ted Brader, "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions," American Journal of Political Science, 49 (April 2005): 388-405.
- Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Charles Taber, and Gallya Lahav, "Threat Anxiety and Support for Antiterrorism Policies," American Journal of Political Science, 49 (July 2005): 593-608.

**Thursday, February 12:** *Social Identities*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 7.
- Donald P. Green, Eric Schickler, and Bradley Palmquist, Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters (2002): Chapter 2, "Partisan Groups as Objects of Identification," 24-51.
- Donald L. Kinder and Nicholas Winter, "Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy," American Journal of Political Science, 45 (April 2001): 439-456.

**Tuesday, February 17:** *Self-Interest*

- Paul R. Brewer, "Public Opinion, Economic Issues, and the Vote: Are Presidential Elections 'All About the Benjamins'?" In, Understanding Public Opinion, edited by Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (2001): 243-262.
- Robert Erikson, "Economic Conditions and the Presidential Vote," American Political Science Review, 83 (1989): 567-676.

**Thursday, February 19:** *The News Media*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 8.
- Martin Gilens, "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media," Public Opinion Quarterly, 60 (1996): 515-541.
- Mark Hetherington, "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." American Journal of Political Science, 40 (1996): 372-395.

**Tuesday, February 24:** *The News Media (continued)*

- John Zaller, "Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science," PS: Political Science & Politics, 31 (June 1998): 182-189.
- Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," Political Science Quarterly, 118 (Winter 2003-2004): 569-598.



**EXAM #1: Thursday, February 26**



## SPRING RECESS: March 2-6

### III. ORGANIZING ATTITUDES

**Tuesday, March 10:** *The Nature of Mass Belief Systems*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 3.
- Mark A. Peffley and Jon Hurwitz, "A Hierarchical Model of Attitude Constraint," *American Journal of Political Science*, 29 (1985): 871-890.
- James W. Prothro and Charles M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," *Journal of Politics*, 22 (1960): 276-294.

**Thursday, March 12:** *Core Values and Beliefs*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 6.
- Stanley Feldman, "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values," *American Journal of Political Science*, 32 (May 1988): 416-440.
- Darren W. Davis and Brian D. Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America," *American Journal of Political Science*, 48 (January 2004): 28-46.
- James B. Murphy, "Tug of War," *Education Next* (Fall 2003): 70-76.

### IV. THE DISTRIBUTION OF OPINION

**Tuesday, March 17:** *One State, Two State, Red State, Blue State*

- Michael Barone, "The 49 Percent Nation," *National Journal* (June 9, 2001).
- Morris P. Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (2006): Chapters 1-2.

### V. MOVEMENT IN PUBLIC OPINION

**Thursday, March 19:** *What Moves Public Opinion?*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 4.
- Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (1992): Chapter 2, "The Myth of Capricious Change," 37-66.
- James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings* (1999): Chapter 2, "The Concept of Policy Mood," 19-36.



- Marc J. Hetherington and Michael Nelson, "Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism," PS: Political Science and Politics, 36 (January 2003): 37-42.

## VI. ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

### Tuesday, March 24: *Social Capital and Civic Participation*

- Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," The American Prospect, 7 (1996).
- Garry Wills, "Putnam's America," The American Prospect (November 30, 2002).
- Nicole B. Ellison, Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe, "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12 (July 2007): 1143-1168.
- Keith Hampton, et al., "Social Media and the 'Spiral of Silence,'" Pew Research Center (August 2014).

### Thursday, March 26: *Understanding Trends in Voter Turnout*

- Thomas Patterson, "The Vanishing Voter: Why Are the Voting Booths So Empty?" National Civic Review (Winter 2002): 367-378.
- Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter," American Political Science Review, 95 (December 2001): 963-974.



## OUTLINE and BIBLIOGRAPHY: Due Thursday, March 26

### Tuesday, March 31: *Getting Out the Vote*

- Marshall Ganz, "Motor Voter or Motivated Voter?" The American Prospect, 28 (1996): 41-48.
- Patrick C. Meirick and Daniel B. Wackman, "Kids Voting and Political Knowledge: Narrowing Gaps, Informing Votes," Social Science Quarterly, 85 (December 2004): 1161-1177.
- Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, "Does Canvassing Increase Voter Turnout? A Field Experiment," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States, 96 (September 1999): 10939-10942.

### Thursday, April 2: *Models of Voting Behavior*

- Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," American Political Science Review, 74 (March 1980): 78-91.
- Morris Fiorina, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope, "The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election: Can Retrospective Voting Be Saved?" British Journal of Political Science, 33 (April 2003): 163-187.

**Tuesday, April 7:** *Elections as an Instrument of Popular Control*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011) Chapter 9.
- Richard R. Lau and David P. Redlawsk, "Voting Correctly," *American Political Science Review*, 91 (September 1997): 585-598.
- Larry M. Bartels, "Uniformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections," *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (1996): 194-230.

## VII. CONSEQUENCES

**Thursday, April 9:** *The Interplay between Public Opinion and Public Policy*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 10.
- Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 77 (1983): 175-190.
- Robert Weissberg, "Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls," *Policy Analysis*, 301 (May 29, 2001): 1-16.

**Tuesday, April 14:** *Manipulating Opinion*

- Kathleen M. McGraw, "Manipulating Public Opinion." In, *Understanding Public Opinion*, edited by Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (2001): 265-280.
- Michael Barone, "Polls are Part of the Air Politicians Breathe," *Public Perspective*, 8 (1997): 1-2.
- Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Debunking the Pandering Politician Myth," *Public Perspective*, 8 (April/May 1997): 3-5.
- Frank Luntz, "The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America" (1995). See also: <http://www.luntzspeak.com>.

**Thursday, April 16:** *Trust in Government*

- Marc J. Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust," *American Political Science Review*, 92 (December 1998): 791-808.
- John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, "Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be," *American Political Science Review*, 95 (March 2001): 145-153.



## **EXAM #2: Tuesday, April 21**

**Thursday, April 23:** *Governing by Public Opinion*

- Erikson and Tedin (2011): Chapter 11.

- V.O. Key, "Public Opinion and American Democracy." In, The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Edited by Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd (2007): 387.reading assignment.

**Tuesday, April 28:** *Concluding Remarks*

- No reading assignment.



**RESEARCH PAPER: Thursday, May 7 by 1:30 PM**