

# political opinion

PLSC 427  
SUMMER 2014  
111 BORLAND  
M-F 11:10-12:25 P.M.

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OFFICE HOURS: M/W 1-3 P.M.  
& BY APPOINTMENT

Public opinion is a key component of any successful democracy. In many ways, public opinion is the benchmark against which outcomes from democratic processes can be assessed. It is the signifier of what individuals and groups believe and want and a guide used by politicians and other key actors in the decision-making process. We will explore the topic of public opinion in this course by examining its structure and dynamics. What is public opinion and why should you care about it? What is your opinion, where did it come from, and when does it change? How do we know what your opinion is and how does your opinion compare to the opinion of others? And, perhaps most importantly, should politicians care about or listen to what you think? We will begin by focusing on the major conceptions of public opinion and the ways in which it can be measured. Then we will focus on opinion at both the micro-level and the macro-level. Finally we will explore the consequences of public opinion, including its connection to public policy and representation.

## course objectives

The goals of the course are divided into three areas:

### CORE CONCEPTS

The core concepts to be mastered by the end of the semester are the varying conceptions and measurement of public opinion, the types and sources of micro-level opinions, the theories of and trends in macro-level opinions, the knowledge of non-political opinions, and the consequences of public opinion for democratic functioning.

### CRITICAL THOUGHT

Beyond mastering the core concepts, the goal of the course is to develop the ability to *think critically* about the core concepts. Critical thought includes the ability to adopt the perspective of various theoretical positions, use these theories as a basis for critique, discuss public opinion with experts, including academics, pollsters, and government officials, the analyze and interpret trends in public opinion to non-experts, and draw linkages between reports on public opinion and the actions of key political actors.

### SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Closely related to critical thought is skill development. Skill development emphasizes “hard” skills related to the measurement and interpretation of public opinion data. Specifically, skill development will include the ability to design and construct a simple survey, collect and enter data into a worksheet, analyze data using simple statistics, interpret and express trends in public opinion through writing and speaking, and finally to locate data and reports on public opinion online.

## expectations

I have a few simple expectations: prepare for class, attend class on time, contribute to classroom discussion, be courteous to fellow classmates, and have fun. I think that if everyone follows these expectations then we will have a much more productive and enjoyable semester.

## course material

- Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2011. *Conducting Empirical Analysis: Public Opinion in Action*. Washington, D.C.: Sage.
- All readings will be available via Angel

## angel

I will regularly post class material and updates to Angel, which can be accessed at [angel.psu.edu](http://angel.psu.edu). Think of Angel as the new Facebook. It is your friend.

## requirements

In addition to reading, you are responsible for the following:

### **IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES** (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

There will be several in-class activities, including writing response papers, discussing current events, and analyzing trends in public opinion. The in-class activities will be announced in the prior class and email reminders will be sent out the day before.

### **SHORT ASSIGNMENTS** (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

There will be a total of 12 short assignments (3 assignments/per week for 4 weeks) from the *Conducting Empirical Analysis* workbook. The due dates for these assignments are listed below, but please note that the assignments are always due at the beginning of class on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

### **RESEARCH REPORT** (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

This assignment will be a 2-page analysis of a trend in public opinion. The due date for the report is listed in the schedule. Details on the assignment will be forthcoming.

### **FINAL EXAM** (*worth 25% of your final grade*)

The final exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay. It will include material from the whole semester.

## grades

A couple notes about grades: 1) late work will be penalized 10% for each day late, 2) make-up work is only permitted for excused absences, and 3) the following scale will be used for grading:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>University description</b>
A	94-100	Exceptional Achievement
A-	90-93	
B+	87-89	Extensive Achievement
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	76-79	
C	70-75	Acceptable Achievement
D	60-69	
F	59 and below	Inadequate Achievement

## disabilities

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) website at [www.equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/). Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

## academic integrity

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously.

### COURSE WORK

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation should check with their instructor.

### EXAMS

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

### VIOLATIONS

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator constitutes a violation of academic integrity. In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts.

# PLSC 427: class schedule\*

## conceptions of public opinion

### PUBLIC OPINION AS AGGREGATION AS MAJORITARIAN

#### Monday, May 19

- Glynn, Carroll J., Susan Herbst, Garrett J. O'Keefe, Robert Y. Shapiro. 1999. *Public Opinion* Bould, CO: Westview Press. **Read chapter 1 ("The Meanings of Public Opinion")**
- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2003. *American Public Opinion, 6th ed.* New York: Longman. **Read pages 6-7 ("Public Opinion Defined")**.
- Scheufele, Dietram, and Patricia Moy. 2000. "Twenty-Five Years of the Spiral of Silence: A Conceptual Review and Empirical Outlook" *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* (12):1, pg. 3-28. **Read pages 3-14.**

### PUBLIC OPINION AS GROUP INTERESTS AS MEDIA AND ELITE OPINION AS FICTION

#### Tuesday, May 20

- Herbst, Susan. 1998. *Reading Public Opinion*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read pages 52-64 ("Public Opinion as Group Sentiment")**.
- Edelman, Murray. 1993. "Contestable Categories and Public Opinion." *Political Communication* (10): 231-242.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1972. "Public Opinion Does Not Exist," in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau, eds., *Communication and Class Struggle* (New York: International General, 1979), pages 124-130.

## measuring public opinion

### SAMPLING AND COLLECTING DATA

#### Wednesday, May 21

- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2003. *American Public Opinion, 6th ed.* New York: Longman. **Read pages 23-34 ("Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion")**.

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\*Readings and assignments are due on the day they are listed.

## QUESTION WORDING

**Thursday, May 22**

- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2003. *American Public Opinion, 6th ed.* New York: Longman. **Read pages 34-39 (“Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion”).**

**Friday, May 24:** Class canceled

**Monday, May 26:** No class (Memorial Day)

## INTERPRETING RESULTS

**Tuesday, May 27**

- Corbett, Michael. 1991. *American Public Opinion: Trends, Processes, and Patterns.* New York: Longman. **Read chapter 5 (“How To Read Survey Results”).**

## ALTERNATIVES TO SURVEYS

**Wednesday, May 28**

- Glynn, Carroll J., Susan Herbst, Garrett J. O’Keefe, Robert Y. Shapiro. 1999. *Public Opinion* Boulder, CO: Westview Press. **Read pages 80-85 (“Focus Groups”), 89-93 (“Experimental Methods and Opinion Research”), and 93-97 (“Content Analysis of Mass Media”).**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 2 (“Political Socialization”), pages 19-25

## CRASH COURSE: SURVEY DATA

**Thursday, May 29**

- No reading or assignment due

# constructs in micro-level opinion

## INTEREST AND KNOWLEDGE

**Friday, May 30**

- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. “What Americans Know about Politics” in *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. **Read pages 69-89.**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 2 (“Political Socialization”), pages 25-31

## POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

**Monday, June 2**

- Lane, Robert. 1962. *Political Ideology.* New York: The Free Press of Glencoe. **Read pages 350-363.**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 3 (“Mass Media”), pages 33-37

## PARTY IDENTIFICATION

**Tuesday, June 3**

- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1964. *The American Voter*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. **Read chapter 5 (“The Impact of Party Identification”).**

## TRUST AND EFFICACY

**Wednesday, June 4**

- Hetherington, Marc. 1998. “The Political Relevance of Political Trust.” *American Political Science Review* 92(4): 791-808. **Read pages 791-797.**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 3 (“Mass Media”), pages 37-40

# sources of micro-level opinion

## SOCIALIZATION

**Thursday, June 5**

- Sapiro, Virginia. 2004. “Not Your Parents’ Political Socialization: Introduction for a New Generation.” *Annual Review of Political Science* (7):1-23. **Read pages 13-19.**

## SELF-INTEREST

**Friday, June 6**

- Campbell, Andrea Louise. 2002. “Self-Interest, Social Security, and the Distinctive Participation Pattern of Senior Citizens.” *American Political Science Review* (96) 3:1-10.
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 4 (“Attitude Stability and Attitude Change”), pages 43-46

## CORE VALUES

**Monday, June 9**

- Chong, Dennis. 1993. “How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties.” *American Journal of Political Science* (37) 3: 867-899. **Read the introduction (pages 867-870) and the section “Common Interpretations of Civil Liberties Issues” (pages 878-888).**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 4 (“Attitude Stability and Attitude Change”), pages 46-51

## SOCIAL IDENTITY

**Tuesday, June 10**

- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2004. *Talking About Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Read pages 28-33.**

## REVIEW OF THE SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

### Wednesday, June 11

- no reading due
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 5 ("Political Ideology"), pages 53-61

# macro-level opinion

## MAJOR TRENDS

### Thursday, June 12

- Pew Research Center's Center for the People and Press; go to <http://www.people-press.org/> and print one article on trends in political opinion to bring to class for discussion.

## THE RATIONAL PUBLIC

## THE MACROPOLITY

### Friday, June 13

- MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson, James A. Stimson. 1989. "Macropartisanship." *American Political Science Review* (83) 4: 1125-1142. **Read pages 1125-1133.**
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 5 ("Political Ideology"), pages 61-66

## MINI-ESSAY

### Monday, June 16

- Class will be in Life Sciences 007.
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 6 ("Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion"), pages 69-77

# student topics!

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

### Tuesday, June 17

- Class will be in Life Sciences 007.

## PREDICTING ELECTIONS

### Wednesday, June 18

- Select one:
  - Easy: <http://mashable.com/2012/11/07/nate-silver-wins/>
  - Moderate: <http://blog.revolutionanalytics.com/2012/11/in-the-2012-election-data-science-was-the-winner.html>
  - Difficult: <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/methodology/>
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 6 ("Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion"), pages 78-85

## GENDER AND PUBLIC OPINION

### Thursday, June 19

- Sapiro, Virginia. 2001. "It's the Context, Situation, and Question, Stupid: The Gender Basis of Public Opinion." In Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox, ed., *Understanding Public Opinion*, 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, pp.21-42.

## DOCUMENTARY

### Friday, June 20

- We will watch "What America Needs: From Sea to Shining Sea" and there will be a 20 minute graded assignment at the end
- *Conducting Empirical Analysis* chapter 7 ("Political Knowledge"), pages 87-92

## RADICALISM

### Monday, June 23

- Otterbourg, Ken. 2014. "Adam Eiding: A Protestor Looks at 40." *The Washington Post Magazine*, January 3.

## MARKETING AND POP CULTURE

### Tuesday, June 24

- No reading or assignment due

# public opinion and public policy

## ELECTIONS

### Wednesday, June 25

- Hill, Kim Quaille, Jan E. Leighley. 1992. "The Policy Consequences of Class Bias in State Electorates." *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (2): 351-365.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

### Thursday, June 26

- Rigby, Elizabeth, and Gerald C. Wright. 2003. "Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in the American States." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3): 552-565. **Read pages 552-555.**

## INTERESTS GROUPS

### Friday, June 27

- Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. "Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (4): 894-910.
- Research report is due

**Monday, June 30:** Final exam (11:00 am - 12:30 pm)