

## POLA 618: Public Opinion and Voting Behavior, Spring 2008

Section 1: MWF 2:00–2:50 p.m., 200A Norman Mayer Building  
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Office: 309 Norman Mayer Building  
Hours: MWF 1:00–2:00 p.m., or by appointment  
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This course is organized around two broad questions: How do people form and express their political beliefs? How do those beliefs influence their choices in elections?

At the heart of a representative democracy lies the transmission of the will of the citizenry to the government. In order to have a full understanding of the shape of government and the choices made by the citizens, we must first comprehend what the “public will” is and how it is formed. The truth about public opinion is that it is often fractious and malleable. What does this mean for our democracy? How do people form opinions? How do citizens process information to create our political evaluations? How is public opinion measured? What is the role of the media with respect to our opinions? These are just a few of the questions we will address in our quest to better understand public opinion in the United States and other democratic societies.

We will also look at the role public opinion plays in the decisions that voters make, both in terms of whether or not they participate and what choice(s) they make in the voting booth. We will also examine other factors that influence voter decision-making, including the roles of political parties, political institutions (including government and laws), and political candidates.

As an upper-division course in political science, another important focus of this course is to expose you to the ways in which political scientists and other social scientists try to understand mass political behavior.

Finally, this course is a *seminar*. While I, as the instructor, will often lecture and lead the discussion in the course, your participation and reading is key to the success of the class. You are expected to complete the readings *prior to class* and to be prepared to discuss their content with your fellow students.

**Texts:** Readings will be taken from the following books:

Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rhode. 2007. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections*. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 0-87289-415-0.

Russell J. Dalton. 2005. *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 4th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 1-56802-999-3.

Carroll J. Glynn et al. 2004. *Public Opinion*, 2nd ed. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press. ISBN 0-8133-4172-8.

Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg, eds. 2001. *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 4th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 1-56802-334-0.

Jane E. Miller. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Writing About Multivariate Analysis*. U of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-52783-2. (*Recommended, not required.*)

W. Phillips Shively. 2004. *The Craft of Political Research*, 6th ed. New York: Prentice-Hall. ISBN 0-13-117440-1. (*Recommended, not required.*)

If you have not previously taken a course in social scientific research methods, the Shively book or another introduction to empirical approaches to the social sciences is strongly recommended. Also, if you have not written a paper reporting on the results of a data analysis before, a reference such as the Miller book may be helpful.

Additional readings, as noted on the syllabus by (R), will be made available online via BlackBoard or on reserve at the library.

**Assignments and Grading:** Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as indicated:

Research Paper: Literature Review and Hypotheses	7.5%
Research Paper: Data Analysis	7.5%
Research Paper: Draft Paper	5%
Research Paper: Presentation	5%
Research Paper: Final Paper	15%
Discussant Feedback (Paper and Presentation)	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation and Attendance	10%

**Examinations:** There will be two take-home essay examinations in this course. Each exam will be “open book,” and you may make use of your notes and other resources; the only restriction is that you may not seek assistance from other individuals in the course of answering the exam questions. The midterm exam will be due on **Friday, March 7th**, and the final exam will be due at the scheduled examination time for this course, as determined by the university registrar’s office.

**Research Paper:** Each student will select, in consultation with the instructor, a research topic involving public opinion and/or voting in the United States or another democratic society. The topic must focus on the *mass public* and must employ some form of *quantitative empirical analysis* to test hypotheses about individual opinion formation, opinion articulation, or voting. Over the course of the semester, we will discuss how to conduct such an analysis. The paper will be produced in stages over the course of the semester.

You will select a topic in consultation with the instructor by **Friday, February 15th**. After choosing a topic, you will compile a *literature review* which discusses the relevant past research on your topic, along with a discussion of the theory and *hypotheses* that your paper will be examining; this portion of the paper is due on **Friday, March 14th**.

You will then complete an analysis of the relevant data for testing your hypotheses and “write up” your results, indicating what data were used, what analytic technique(s) were employed, what your data analysis found, and whether or not those results were consistent with your theoretical expectations. This portion of the paper is due on **Friday, March 28th**.

A complete draft of the final paper, including the literature review and data analysis sections, along with some tentative conclusions, will be due on **Friday, April 11th**; a copy of the paper should be submitted electronically, and this copy will be distributed to the other students in this class via Blackboard. On the 11th, a *discussant* from the class will be randomly assigned for each paper. The discussant’s responsibilities are two-fold:

1. Each discussant will prepare a response paper, at least one page in length, that will provide constructive feedback on the draft paper. This response paper is due **Monday, April 21st**; a

copy of this paper should also be provided to the author of the original paper.

2. Each discussant will prepare a brief (approximately five minute) oral response to the paper, which they will present in class after the original paper presentation, in which they will discuss the contribution of the original paper and present a summary of their response paper.

During the days scheduled for research presentations, each paper author will present a 10–15 minute summary of his or her paper, focusing on the key finding(s) of the paper; this presentation will be followed by the discussant’s feedback and questions from the class and your professor.

In the final paper, due **Monday, April 28th**, each author is expected to incorporate or otherwise address the suggestions from their discussant and the professor, within reason.

**General Paper Requirements:** All papers written for this course must be word-processed or electronically typeset. The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12 point).<sup>1</sup> Your paper must be an individual effort; you may consult with me, the Writing Studio, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

The paper must consistently utilize an “author-year” citation style, such as that of the [American Political Science Association](#) (or, if you prefer, one of the Modern Language Association or American Psychological Association styles), include appropriate figures and tables and a full bibliography listing the works cited in your paper, and be written using coherent prose and acceptable grammar. You should also include a title page with the date, title, and appropriate identifying information.

**General Policies:** Attendance at class is required. Please discuss any planned absences with me at least two weeks in advance. Absences, repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, and abuse of Internet technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing during class) will adversely affect your grade in the course.

**Please arrive at class *on time* and mute (or switch off) all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class.**

Please note that appointments are *not required* for my regular office hours listed above. If those times are not convenient for you, I am happy to make arrangements to meet at alternative times; you can make appointments via email or by seeing me immediately before or after class.

**Late assignments will lose 5 percentage points per calendar day they are late.**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me to discuss their individual needs for accommodations.

This syllabus is subject to revision by the professor.

**Grade Appeals:** If you wish to dispute a grade for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

**Academic Integrity and Honesty:** All students in this course are expected to comply with the Code of Academic Integrity of the Newcomb-Tulane College, which can be found online at

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<sup>1</sup>Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond, etc. “Typewriter” (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are not acceptable.

<http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm>. An excerpt from the honor code appears below:

The integrity of the Newcomb-Tulane College is based on the absolute honesty of the entire community in all academic endeavors. As part of the Tulane University community, students have certain responsibilities regarding work that forms the basis for the evaluation of their academic achievement. Students are expected to be familiar with these responsibilities at all times. No member of the university community should tolerate any form of academic dishonesty because the scholarly community of the university depends on the willingness of both instructors and students to uphold the Code of Academic Conduct. When a violation of the Code of Academic Conduct is observed it is the duty of every member of the academic community who has evidence of the violation to take action. Students should take steps to uphold the code by reporting any suspected offense to the instructor or the associate dean of the college. Students should under no circumstances tolerate any form of academic dishonesty.

In all work submitted for academic credit, students are expected to represent themselves honestly. The presence of a student's name on any work submitted in completion of an academic assignment is considered to be an assurance that the work and ideas are the result of the student's own intellectual effort, stated in his or her own words, and produced independently, unless clear and explicit acknowledgment of the sources for the work and ideas is included (with the use of quotation marks when quoting someone else's words). This principle applies to papers, tests, homework assignments, artistic productions, laboratory reports, computer programs, and other assignments.

**Course Roadmap:** An approximate schedule of topics to be covered in the course follows. Revisions to this roadmap may be made, and additional readings may be assigned, throughout the semester as circumstances warrant. Readings marked with (R) will be made available online via BlackBoard and/or JSTOR, or as library reserves.

**Jan 14** Introduction

Empiricism and behavioralism in political science

*Optional reading:* Shively, ch. 1

**Jan 16, 18, 23** What is public opinion?

No class on Jan 21 (Martin Luther King Day)

The basics: What is public opinion? Why should we care?

The history of public opinion

Beliefs, attitudes, and opinions

Glynn, ch. 1–2.

Dalton, ch. 1–2.

Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*, ch. 1–2 (R).

**Jan 25, 28** Measuring Public Opinion

Sampling and measurement error; accuracy and precision

True attitudes as unobservable variables

The psychology of the survey response

Glynn, ch. 3.

Converse, “Attitudes and Non-Attitudes” (R)

Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*, ch. 5 (R).

*Optional reading:* Shively, ch. 4–5.

**Jan 30, Feb 1** Psychological Perspectives on Opinion Formation

Conditioning theories

Consistency theories

Judgment-based theories

Motivational theories (including the Zaller RAS model)

The “competing considerations” model of Alvarez and Brehm

Glynn, ch. 4.

Alvarez and Brehm, “American Ambivalence Towards Abortion Policy” (R)

**Feb 4** No class: Mardi Gras Break

**Feb 6, 8** Sociological Perspectives

Stereotyping

Group Norms

Perception and opinion formation

Glynn, ch. 5–6.

**Feb 11, 13** Political Knowledge and Public Opinion

What is political sophistication?

Does political sophistication matter?

Glynn, ch. 8.

Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (R).

Lawrence, “Should Voters Be Encyclopedias?” (R)

**Feb 15, 18, 20** “Hands-On” Public Opinion

Basic Bivariate and Multivariate Data Analysis

Analyzing the National Election Study and the General Social Survey

Analyzing the World Values Survey

Handouts and in-class demonstrations

*Optional reading:* Shively, ch. 8–10.

**Feb 22, 25** No Class: APSA Teaching and Learning Conference

**Feb 27** Introduction to Voting and Political Participation

From Niemi and Weisberg: “The Study of Voting and Elections.”

**Feb 29, Mar 3** Participation, Turnout, and Protest

Abramson et al., ch. 4

Dalton, ch. 3–4

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Why Is Voter Turnout Low (And Why Is It Declining)?”; Putnam; Rosenstone and Hansen; Franklin.

**Mar 5, 7** Party Systems and Realignment

Critical Elections and Realignment

The 1960s Realignments in America and Europe

Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections.” (R)

Dalton, ch. 5–7.

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Is the Party System Changing?”; Stanley and Niemi, “Party Coalitions in Transition”; Aldrich and Niemi, “The Sixth American Party System.”

**Mar 10, 12, 14** Traditional Models of Vote Choice

The “Columbia” Model: social forces

The “Michigan” Model: party identification and the “normal vote”

The “Chicago/Rochester” Model: rational choice and utility maximization

Abramson et al., ch. 5

Dalton, ch. 8–9

Glynn et al., ch. 7

From Niemi and Weisberg: “What Determines the Vote?”; Miller and Shanks; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau.

**Mar 17, 19, 21, 24** No Class: Spring Break and Easter

**Mar 26** Issue Voting

Abramson et al., ch. 6

Dalton, ch. 10

**Mar 28** Retrospective and Economic Voting

Abramson et al., ch. 7

From Niemi and Weisberg: Nadeau and Lewis-Beck.

**Mar 31; Apr 2** Party Identification

Abramson et al., ch. 8

From Niemi and Weisberg: “How Much Does Politics Affect Party Identification?”; Miller; Green, Schickler, and Palmquist; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, “Macropartisanship: The Permanent Memory of Partisan Evaluation.”

**Apr 4** No Class: Midwest Political Science Association Conference

**Apr 7, 9** Political Sophistication Revisited: Vote Choice and Political Sophistication

Lawrence, “The Role of Political Sophistication in Retrospective Evaluations of Coalition Performance” (R)

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Does Lack of Political Information Matter?”; Althaus, “Information Effects in Collective Preferences”; Lau and Redlawsk, “Voting Correctly”; Page and Shapiro, “Rational Public Opinion”

**Apr 11, 14** Ticket-Splitting and Divided Government

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Do Voters Prefer Divided Government?”; Fiorina; Burden and Kimball.

**Apr 16, 18** Elections in the 21st Century

Abramson et al., parts 1, 3, and 4 (*skim parts 1 and 3*).

Dalton, ch. 11–12.

**Apr 21, 23, 25, 28; May 8, 8:00–Noon** Research Presentations