POSC 343/443: Public Opinion
Fall, 2007
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Office Hours: MWF 10:30-11:20 or any time my door is open

Description
This course will examine the origins and implications of public opinion in American politics. We will cover topics including the formation of public opinion, influences on public opinion, and the relationship between opinions and voting behavior. Throughout the course, we will address consistent themes, such as the rationality of public opinion and political behavior, the methodological challenges of studying public opinion, and the implications of our findings for democratic theory.

While there are readings throughout the course, this is not a class in which you will passively absorb materials from books and lectures. One of the great benefits of studying public opinion is that we have access to so much data that it is relatively easy for students to start doing their own research. We will take advantage of this throughout the class, and you will have many opportunities to investigate the claims made in lectures and readings for yourselves. Under no circumstances should you take anything I say, or anything the readings say at face value.

In particular, you should become acquainted with the following website:
http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm.
This website provides access to several of the most respected national surveys with a simple, web-based interface that allows anyone to easily view results and conduct simple analysis. In particular, the General Social Survey (GSS) and the American National Election Studies (ANES- no jokes, please) are well-run surveys with questions on more than most students would ever want to know. You will be given periodic advice on how to use these and similar resources because you will be asked periodically to bring findings to class, as well as to use these resources for papers (more on that below).

Course procedures
This course meets three times per week. Mondays will generally be devoted to lecture, focusing on the theoretical issues for the week. Wednesdays will also be mostly lecture-based, but with an emphasis on explaining the data used in the readings. Public opinion studies are based on analysis of large amounts of data, and you will become acquainted with table-readings skills throughout the class. It is crucial that you understand not only the broad arguments made by the readings, but the evidence the authors use to support their arguments. You should complete the week's readings by Monday, but it is essential that you attend Wednesday's class having completed the week's readings, and you should bring the readings with you. If there are questions on specific elements of the readings, such as how to read a table, what the researchers

did, or why they did it, I will address those first. I will use whatever time remains to discuss the specific data used by the readings, and how they were analyzed. Fridays will be devoted entirely to discussion. By Friday morning at 9:00 AM (about the time I get to my office in the mornings), you should have emailed me a discussion question. Discussion questions should not be the types of questions with simple answers. They should be the types of questions about which the class can debate. On the basis of those questions, I will steer the discussion on Friday to topics that the most people find the most interesting. Submitting these questions is required, and it is to your advantage to think about them before sending them to minimize the likelihood of being bored during discussions.

Course Requirements
Course requirements are as follows: one short analysis paper (15%), one term paper (30%), one take-home midterm (15%), one take-home final (25%), class participation (15%).

The short paper will be due on 10/8. By "short," I mean that the paper should be no longer than 1000 words. The topic is, essentially, whatever you want. You will be asked to pose a simple question about public opinion, and answer it using data available to you from either the SDA website, or other sources (if you can't find what you want on that website, talk to me). The question should be of a "causal" nature. You should pose a question about what explains differences in public opinion on some dimension (e.g., why do some people support policy X and some people oppose policy X). You should pose a hypothesis based on course materials, and you should examine survey data to determine how much support there is for your claim. If you don't have a background in statistics, don't worry. You will not be required to do anything more complicated than a simple table of cross-tabulations (comparing percentages). Monday sessions will cover enough about compiling basic tables, etc., that you should be able to do the analysis you need, and if you need assistance beyond that, come to my office.

The term paper will be due at the end of the last week of class, and will be on a topic of your choosing as well. You should develop a more elaborate question, and conduct more analysis. Because the topic is flexible, and requires a significant amount of work, students should plan to meet with me regularly. The following is a timeline for completing specific tasks for the term paper: submit a topic and a list of survey questions that will be used (10/15), brief summary of results (11/5), rough draft (11/19).

In addition to completing a term paper, you will make brief presentations to the class at the end of the semester discussing your questions and your findings. 1/6 of the term paper grade (5% of the total course grade) will be based on this presentation.

Graduate students will be required to submit a more elaborate paper. In addition to data analysis, graduate students will be required to submit a full literature review, placing their papers in the context of a scholarly debate, just as academic journal articles do. Graduate students should plan to speak with me as early as possible in order to begin this process.

Attendance
Attendance is required. You may miss three sessions for any reason. Each absence beyond that will result in a two percentage point deduction from course participation grades. You are also expected to show up on time. One of my pet peeves is for students to walk in after the class has started. I find it distracting and disrespectful. You may show up late once during the semester. Each time you show up late beyond that, one percentage point will be deducted from your course participation grade. The objective is not to punish you for being late. The objective is to get you to show up on time. If you have a class on the other side of campus just before our class, you need to speak with me about it at the beginning of the semester.

Falling asleep in class policy
        My other pet peeve... There is NOTHING worse than falling asleep in class, and I have no tolerance at all for it. If I catch you sleeping, your course participation grade will be reduced by five points. You don't get any free passes on this. If you can't stay awake in class, don't come to class. Drinking heavily caffeinated beverages during class is perfectly acceptable. If you don't think you can stay awake, it is also acceptable to say you aren't feeling well, and ask to be excused.

Classroom rules:
1: Check your ideology at the door. The classroom is not the place to preach. It is a place to keep an open mind.
2: Be respectful. Show up on time, pay attention, participate, and TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES.

Texts:
The primary books for this class are as follows:

Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections*

Niemi, Richard G. and Herbert F. Weisberg, editors, *Controversies in Voting Behavior 4th Edition*

Sniderman, Paul M., Richard A. Brody and Philip E. Tetlock, *Reasonig and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*

Zaller, John R., *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*

Additional readings are available on the course Blackboard site, and may be downloaded as pdf documents.

Schedule:

8/27 - 8/29   Introduction, Basic Paradigms of Psychology and Economics

Downs, Chapter 1 (on Blackboard)
Sniderman et. al, Chapters 1-2

8/31   NO CLASS (Professor out of town)

9/3   NO CLASS (Labor Day)

9/5 - 9/7   Information
                Niemi and Weisberg, Chapter 6, 7, 9
                Downs, Chapters 11-13 (on Blackboard)

9/10 - 9/14   Issue Positions
                Zaller, Chapters 1-3
                Sniderman et al., Chapters 3-5
                Alford, Funk and Hibbing, "Are Political Orientations Genetically
                    Transmitted" (on Blackboard)

9/17 - 9/28   Ideology and Partisanship
                Converse, "The Nature and Origins..." (on Blackboard)
                Sniderman et al., Chapters 7-8, 12
                Niemi and Weisberg, Part V (Chapters 17-20)

10/1 - 10/5   Influence and Attitude Change
                Zaller, Chapters 6-9
                Iyengar and Kinder, Chapters 1-4, 7 (on Blackboard)

10/8 - 10/12   Voter Turnout
                Niemi and Weisberg Part I (Chapters 2-5)
                McDonald and Popkin, (on Blackboard)
                Abramson et al. Chapter 4
                Teixeira, (on Blackboard)

10/15 - 10/26   Vote Choice
                Niemi and Weisberg, Chapters 8, 10-13
                Sniderman et al., Chapters 9-10
                Abramson et al., Chapters 5-8
                Achen and Bartels, "Blind Retrospection" (on Blackboard)

10/22   NO CLASS (Fall Break)

10/29 - 11/2   Nomination Process
                Abramson et al., Chapter 1
                Polsby and Wildavsky, Chapters 3, 4 (on Blackboard)

11/5 - 11/9   General Elections
                              Abramson et al., Chapters 2-3
                              Polsby and Wildavsky, Chapter 5 (on Blackboard)

11/12 - 11/16   2004/2006 Congressional Elections
                              Abramson et al., Chapters 9-11

11/19 - 11/21   2008
                              Abramson et al., Chapter 12
                              Additional readings TBA

11/23   NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

11/26 - 12/7   Wrap-up, review, presentations