

Pol 309: Public Opinion & Political Psychology

Holman Rm. 38

2:00 pm - 2:50 pm

Monday, Wednesday, & Friday

Contact Information

Miles T. Armaly
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Deupree Hall 233
Email: mtarmaly@olemiss.edu

Office Hours: By appointment only

Course Description

Public opinion is not simply a summary of citizens' attitudes about a political actor, event, or issue. Instead, public opinion itself operates as a powerful force in American politics that serves two important functions: (A) to express the preferences of ordinary individuals and (B) to constrain the actions of political elites (i.e., politicians and party activists). In this course, students will examine the basic elements of public opinion, its derivation, and consequences. Specifically, we will explore (among other things) political socialization, attachments to various political groups (i.e., partisan and ideological groups), racial attitudes, the influence of the media, and the role of personality in shaping political opinions. Additionally, we will consider the various ways that public opinion is measured, the psychological principles that underlie and guide public opinion, how individuals interpret new political information, and the influence of certain attitudes, beliefs, and orientations toward the government.

Upon completion of this course, I expect students to demonstrate:

1. Understanding of how and why people think about politics the way they do
2. Recognition of the etiology of individual attitudes
3. Effective communication – oral and written – of beliefs about the political world
4. Informed consumption of and analytical reasoning about political information

Course Materials

We will reference one textbook in this course:

- Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. 2019. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact*. 10th Edition. Routledge.

We will also reference several academic articles. These will be disseminated via the course's Blackboard page.

Course Requirements

PARTICIPATION

As this class focuses on public opinion, it is crucial that you share yours. Students are expected to contribute to class discussions, in-class simulations and exercises, and attend class. Although there is no official attendance policy, systematic absences or a lack of participation when present will be reflected in the student's final grade.

Participation will account for the ongoing pandemic and associated absences.

While I recognize – and sympathize – with those who are timid, shy, or simply prefer not to share their opinion, this course requires participation. Inasmuch as one of the major course topics is the appropriate measurement of public opinion, the opinion of the class cannot be accurately measured without participation from all students. Alternate forms of participation (e.g., speaking with the instructor after class, emailing questions, etc.) will be counted, but the primary form of participation should come in the classroom.

DATA PRESENTATION

Each day (after the first couple of weeks), class will begin with a student presentation. Each student is required to present actual public opinion data that corresponds (broadly) with the topic being discussed that week. Presentations should last around 4-6 minutes and focus on connecting course material to real-world public opinions. Then, presenters should be prepared to field 3-5 minutes of questions from their peers. Presentations can take any form, but a presentation lacking visual aids is unlikely to receive a high score. In the first or second week of the course, students will select a date for their presentation; some days there will be 2 presentations. No exceptions (with obvious exceptions for things like serious, documented illness) will be made if a student fails to attend his or her presentation.

MIDTERM EXAM

The midterm consisting of short answer and essay questions will be given via Blackboard.

FINAL EXAM

There isn't one. Your final paper (described below) is due at 4 pm on Monday, December 6 (when our final is scheduled). You will submit your final paper via Blackboard.

FINAL PAPER

As this is an upper-level course, and the single most marketable skill that liberal arts education provides is effective communication, a crucial element of this course is an original research paper. Students will employ the substantive knowledge they have gained about public opinion to a research topic of their choice.

While students are certainly permitted to conduct original analyses, this is not required. The research paper should explore a topic in-depth and incorporate scholarly citations beyond what appears in the syllabus or are discussed in class. **The rough draft must incorporate at least five (5) scholarly sources, and the final draft must incorporate at least ten (10) such sources.** Scholarly sources are this that appear in academic books or articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Journalistic sources do not qualify.

A few example topics are:

- Do citizens hold cogent and consistent policy attitudes? Why or why not?
- From where does American public opinion originate?
- What are the sources of polarization in the American electorate?

Students should begin considering a topic as soon as possible. The paper will be developed in stages. The Final Paper will be graded in 3 stages:

- Proposal due: 10% (September 22)
- Rough draft 20% (October 29)
- Final draft 70% (December 6)

Due dates for each stage appear in the Important Dates table below.

Grades

Your class performance will be evaluated upon the following criteria:

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Participation | 15% |
| Data Presentation | 15% |
| Midterm Exam | 30% |
| Final Paper | 40% |

The grading scale follows the University's Plus-Minus rubric (without the A-):

| | | | |
|----|---------|----|--------|
| A | 90-100% | | |
| B+ | 87-89% | B | 83-86% |
| B- | 80-82% | C+ | 77-79% |
| C | 73-76% | C- | 70-72% |
| D | 60-69% | F | 0-59% |

Course Policies

GENERAL STATEMENT

You are responsible for informing yourself of all departmental, college, and university policies governing your conduct in this course. This includes, but is not limited to, policies relating to plagiarism/academic integrity and the accommodation of students with documented disabilities.

COVID-19 POLICIES

You are responsible for informing yourself of all departmental, college, and university policies governing your conduct in this course regarding COVID-19. This includes, but is not limited to, classroom health requirements, non-adherence with health requirements, and attendance policies as laid out in current university policy. Please see <https://coronavirus.olemiss.edu> for more information.

COURSE COMMUNICATIONS

Updates and additional materials will be sent out via our course's Blackboard page. Please alter your Blackboard settings such that you are notified when announcements are posted.

INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY

If you have any questions, quips, queries, qualms, comments, or concerns, please contact me via email. Be certain to include "POL 309" in the subject line along with a substantive topic. Please include an email signature that includes your first and last name (so I know to whom I'm responding!). I will endeavor to respond to all email messages within 12 hours on weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. If you have not received a response within 24 hours, please resend your message. For time sensitive matters, resend your message after 12 hours. All office hours will be held virtually this semester. Email me to set up a time.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

There is no official attendance policy in this course. Please note that the University requires that all students have a verified attendance at least once during the first two weeks of the semester for each course. *If attendance is not verified, you will be dropped from the course and any financial aid will be adjusted accordingly.* Please see <http://olemiss.edu/gotoclass> for more information.

GRADE APPEALS

All grading concerns should be submitted via email with a concise statement expressing why you believe your grade should be altered. All concerns – arithmetic or otherwise – must be

raised within *one week* of when the grade was posted. No grade challenges will be entertained after one week. I reserve the right to *reduce points* on any grade appeal.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

This course has a zero tolerance policy in regards to academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as conduct that violates any of the following principles: (a) supplying or using work or answers that are not one's own (this includes mis-citing a source); (b) providing or accepting assistance with completing assignments or examinations beyond collaborative learning; or (c) interfering through any means with another's academic work. Collaborative learning (i.e., working or studying with your peers) in this course is encouraged, but if you study together, you must produce your own work. This includes not submitting verbatim or near-verbatim answers to assignments. To do so violates both the spirit and the letter of academic integrity. The penalties for dishonesty will vary from getting 0 points on an individual assignment up to getting a 0.0 grade for the entire semester. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to your college and department.

If you are not sure a certain action will be considered academically dishonest, it is in your best interest to assume it is until told otherwise. **Please feel free to ask if any action will be considered academic dishonesty in this course.** And, remember that what may be acceptable in this course may be inappropriate in another, and vice versa. Additionally, consult the University *M Book* for more information.

STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES

The University of Mississippi is committed to the creation of inclusive learning environments for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your full inclusion and participation or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Barriers may include, but are not necessarily limited to, timed exams and in-class assignments, difficulty with the acquisition of lecture content, inaccessible web content or the use of non-captioned or non-transcribed video and audio files. You must also contact Student Disability services at 662-915-7128 so that office 1) provide you with an Instructor Notification form, 2) facilitate the removal of barriers and 3) ensure that you have equal access to the same opportunities for success that are available to all students.

All reasonable accommodations will be made in this course. I encourage students not only to take advantages of these services when appropriate, but to inform the instructor of any qualifying consideration *as soon as possible*. Accommodations for disabilities should be arranged well in advance of any student assessment. Please see University Student Disability Services for more information.

Course Schedule

Table 1: Important Dates

| | |
|--------------|--|
| September 22 | Final paper proposal due |
| October 15 | Midterm exam window closes on Blackboard |
| October 29 | Final paper rough draft due |
| December 6 | Final paper final draft due |

**All assignments due at 11:59 pm, Oxford, MS time.

Daily reading assignments are listed below. Reading assignments are listed according to the day on which the subject will be discussed. Thus, you should read the assigned material *prior* to the date listed. Note that some readings will be discussed across multiple class periods. Unless the Erikson & Tedin text is specified, you will be able to find the assigned reading on Blackboard.

Week 1 (Aug 23, 25, & 27): Course Introduction

Discuss syllabus

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 1

Part I: What is Public Opinion and How do we Measure It?

Week 2 (Aug 30, Sep 1 & 3): Democratic Theory & Influence of Opinion

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 6

Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee. 1954. "Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory."

Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. Chapter 1.

Page, Benjamin I., Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(1): 51-73.

Week 3 (Sep 8 & 10): Measuring Public Opinion

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 2

Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36: 579-616.

Bartels, Larry M. 2003. "Democracy with Attitudes" in *Electoral Democracy*, eds. Michael MacKuen and George Rabinowitz. University of Michigan Press. Pages 48-82. [LINK](#)

Part II: The Sources of Public Opinion

Week 4 (Sep 13, 15, & 17): Political Socialization

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 5

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1968. "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child." *American Political Science Review* 62(1): 169-184.

Erikson, Robert S., and Laura Stoker. 2011. "Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 105(2): 221-237.

Week 5 (Sep 20, 22, & 24): Ideological Origins PAPER PROPOSAL DUE WEDNESDAY

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 3, pages 68-80

Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 206-219.

Devine, Christopher J. 2015. "Ideological Social Identity: Psychological Attachment to Ideological In-Groups as a Political Phenomenon and a Behavioral Influence." *Political Behavior* 37(3): 509-35.

Week 5 (Sep 27, 29, & Oct 1): Knowledge, Heuristics, and Information

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 3, pages 55-67

Delli-Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. "What Americans Know About Politics." This is a chapter in their book *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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

Week 6 (Oct 4, 6, & 8): Partisanship and Groups

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 3, pages 78-85

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. "The Impact of Party Identification." *The American Voter*. University Of Chicago Press.

Carsey, Thomas M. and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 464-477.

Sides, John. 2016. "Democrats are gay, Republicans are rich: Our stereotypes of political parties are amazingly wrong. The Washington Post/Monkey Cage. [LINK](#)

Week 8 (Oct 11, 13, & 15): Partisan Bias and Motivated Reasoning
MIDTERM EXAM; NO CLASS FRIDAY

Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions." *Political Behavior* 32: 303-330.

Leeper, Thomas J. and Rune Slothuus. 2014. "Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Public Opinion Formation." *Advances in Political Psychology* 35(S1): 129-156.

Gaines, Brian, James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quick, Buddy Peyton, and Jay Verkuilen. 2007. "Same Facts, Different Interpretations: Partisan Motivation and Opinion on Iraq." *Journal of Politics* 69(3): 957-974.

Week 9 (Oct 18, 20, & 22): Media and Framing Effects

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 8

Jacoby, William G. 2000. "Issue Framing and Public Opinion on Government Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(4): 750-767.

Gilliam, Franklin D., Jr., and Shanto Iyengar. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(3): 560-573.

Halpern, Sue. 2019. "The Problem of Political Advertising on Social Media." *The New Yorker*. [LINK](#)

Week 10 (Oct 25, 27, & 29): Race and Racial Attitudes
FINAL PAPER ROUGH DRAFT DUE; NO CLASS FRIDAY

Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 7, pages 193-198

Tesler, Michael. 2012. "The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Race and Racial Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(3): 690-704.

Enders, Adam M. and Jamil Scott. 2019. "The Increasing Racialization of American Electoral Politics, 1988-2016." *American Politics Research* 47(2): 275-303.

Week 11 (Nov 1, 3, & 5): Genopolitics & Emotion

Alford, John R., Carolyn R. Funk, and John R. Hibbing. 2005. "Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?" *American Political Science Review* 99(2): 153-167.

McDermott, Rose, Dustin Tingley, and Peter K. Hatemi. 2014. "Assortative Mating on Ideology Could Operate Through Olfactory Cues." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 997-1005.

Armaly, Miles A., and Adam M. Enders. "The Role of Disgust in Exacerbating Social Polarization."

Week 12 (Nov 8, 10, & 12): Personality

Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, David Doherty, and Conor M. Dowling. 2011. "Personality and Political Attitudes: Relationships Across Issue Domains and Political Contexts." *American Political Science Review* 104(1): 111-133.

Part III: Modern Public Opinion

Week 13 (Nov 15, 17, & 19): Affective Polarization

Edsall, Thomas. "What if All Politics is National?" *The New York Times*. September 19, 2015. [LINK](#)

Edsall, Thomas. "Is Politics a War of Ideas or of Us Against Them?" *The New York Times*. November 6, 2019. [LINK](#)

Iyengar, Shanto, and Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lekles. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(5): 405-31.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. 2015. "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3): 690-707.

Week 7 (Nov 22, 24, & 26): Thanksgiving break

Week 14 (Nov 29, Dec 1 & 3): Conspiracy Theories, Misperceptions, Etc.

Smallpage, Steven M., Adam M. Enders, and Joseph E. Uscinski. 2017. "The Partisan Contours of Conspiracy Beliefs." *Research & Politics* 4(4)

Flynn, D.J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2017. The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics. *Advances in Political Psychology* 38(S1): 127-150.

Ahler, Douglas J. 2014. "Self-fulfilling Misperceptions of Public Polarization." *The Journal of Politics* 76(3): 607-620.

Edsall, Thomas. "The Trump Voters Whose 'Need for Chaos' Obliterates Everything Else." *The New York Times*. September 4, 2019. [LINK](#)