

PS 348  
Public opinion  
Spring, 2020  
T, Th 2:00pm-3:20pm  
Harbert 304

Professor Clinton Jenkins  
Harbert 315  
Office Hours: Th 3:30-5:30 & by appointment  
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### **Course Overview and Goals**

In democratic systems of government, it is assumed that public opinion has a role to play in the direction of public policy and national affairs. As a result, the study of public opinion is a central focus of the study of democratic politics, and thus, American politics. In this course, we will answer a number of questions about public opinion in the context of the U.S., such as: What is public opinion and how do we define it? Where do opinions and attitudes come from? Is the American public polarized? If so, how much? Does the news media influence our opinion? Do Americans even have attitudes about public opinion? If so, what is the nature of Americans' attitudes about contemporary political phenomena and events? What explains these attitudes? Finally, does public opinion matter? That is, does the government listen to the governed?

In the end, the course has five goals. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Define public opinion
- Explain the role of the public opinion in American politics, the development and formation of attitudes and opinions, the nature of Americans' opinion on contemporary political issues, and how public opinion is measured and the use of polling in politics and political science
- Interpret public opinion polls and polling data accurately
- Discuss how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about politics
- Be a savvy consumer of political news and current events, both in this class and beyond.

### **Readings**

Most readings will be from scholarly works and will be posted on Moodle prior to class or there will be a citation to the reading in the syllabus. It is your responsibility to obtain the readings listed for the class period if they are not posted on Moodle. It might be worthwhile for you to download and, if you prefer printed versions as I do, print all of the readings at the beginning of the semester so that you don't have to do it for every class or week.

There are two texts assigned for the class. They are available online and at the bookstore.

James A. Stimson and Christopher Ellis. 2012. *Ideology in America*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2013. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Washington: CQ Press.

It should not be surprising that in addition to the readings assigned each week, that in a political science course it is expected that you will keep up with the daily news. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. If you are not one to read the newspaper there are many other good alternatives (I, for example, prefer to listen to NPR as my main source of the day's news). The one caveat is that your chosen news source must have frequent coverage of national politics. Our discussions will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate concepts from lecture or readings. Regularly consuming the news will not only bring course material to life, but it will also make the class more interesting.

### **Evaluation**

Your grade will be determined based on the following (weights in parentheses):

- Quizzes (25%)
- Public Opinion Research Project (30%)
- Discussion Leading and Questions (15%)
- Final Exam (20%)
- Attendance and Participation (10%)

*Quizzes* – The quizzes in this class serve two purposes. First, to reward frequent attendance. Showing up and attempting the quiz will account for 50% of your quiz grade for each class session. That is, if you show up, write your name on the quiz, and proceed to get every question wrong, you will still get a 50% on the quiz. The second purpose of the quiz is to test your reading, comprehension, and understanding of the material. Quizzes will consist of 5 questions, with each question worth 10 points. If you get three questions correct, for example, you will receive an “80” for that quiz. The quizzes will not be particularly difficult, but you will do well only if you keep up with the reading assignments.

There will be 11 quizzes. I will drop your lowest quiz grade before calculating your final grade. Giving you a total of 10 quiz grades from which your final quiz grade will be calculated. Because of this, you may not make up a quiz if you miss class on that day.

*Public Opinion Research Project* – Your assignment will be to write a paper that analyzes public opinion on an issue of your choice. In doing so, you should address the nature of public opinion on the issue and what the implications are of your findings for political leaders and public policy. This project will involve collecting and summarizing polling data to support your argument about the nature of public opinion on an issue, and then using that polling data to address what this means for the direction public policy should take. There will be a number of due dates for different parts of the paper throughout the semester. During the second week of class you will receive a handout with more information about the assignment, the various components of the assignment, and the due dates for each part of the project. The final paper should be about 10 pages in length.

*Final Exam* – There will be an in-class final exam during finals period. More information will be made about the exam as we get closer to the final date.

*Attendance and Participation* – Your attendance and participation grade will be based on my subjective estimate of how frequently you participate actively and respectfully in class discussion and your completion of weekly in-class reflections and small group discussions. You needn't talk in every class, nor do you need to speak for long. But you should be respectful, engaged, and participate frequently and substantively. I will speak more about how I grade participation during the first day of class.

George “Double R” Martin might have once said that 80% of success is showing up.<sup>1</sup> I believe this is true. Part of being a good colleague and college citizen is showing up to do your part. This means showing up to class, listening respectfully to what your fellow students have to share, and offering your own perspectives on the subject matter. We all benefit by having robust discussions surrounding the topics we cover in class. Not only will participating in discussions help reinforce material from class, but it will also help you think about the world in different ways. But, in order to participate you must be there. You are allowed three absences per-semester. Every absence after that will see your final participation and attendance grade reduced by five percentage-points. I do not excuse absences – it is your responsibility to decide when it is appropriate or inappropriate to use one of your “free” absences or to take the grade reduction. If you have a unique situation, such as an extreme illness, that will cause you to miss a large number of classes during the semester come speak with me.

*Class Discussion Leading* – As this class is taught as a seminar, discussion is key. As such, twice throughout the semester you will be asked to write up a series of discussion questions based on the readings and email them out to the class at least 12 hours before the scheduled class period. You will then be responsible for leading and guiding discussion for those two days. Each time you do this is worth 7.5% of your grade.

At the end of the semester your final grade will be calculated using your grades on each of the metrics above and their respective weights, and you will receive a letter grade based on the following grading scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59).

Here are some final notes about grading in the class:

- If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment please come see me during office hours or send me an e-mail to schedule an appointment to meet in person. I do not discuss grades over e-mail, but am more than happy to sit down with you in person and help you understand why you earned the grade you did and help you get the grade you wish next time.
- If you do not believe that the grade you received is not indicative of your work I will regrade your assignment for you. You must contact me in writing, sending a memo about why you believe you did not deserve the grade that you received. You must

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<sup>1</sup> Woody Allen said this, but previous classes got tired of seeing his quote in my syllabi. And, we don't know that George R. R. Martin didn't say it.

contact me within one week of receiving back your work, if you do not you waive the right for me to reconsider your grade for that assignment. Once I receive your petition in writing I will regrade your work, and the resulting grade, whether higher or lower than your original, will be your final grade for that assignment.

- Late assignments will be penalized by 5-points per business-day that it is late (Monday through Friday).
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. After that is completed we will discuss a new due date.
- If you fail to complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for that assignment.
- There is no extra credit

### **Religious Observances**

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the spiritual development of a diverse student body. The College makes every reasonable effort to allow students to observe religious holidays of obligation without academic penalty. Holidays of obligation are those holidays during which the observant person, according to religious practice, cannot work. Within the first 15 days of the term, students should review course syllabi for potential religious conflicts and notify me of potential conflicts. I will then work with you to make arrangements concerning missed work. Should you fail to alert me of this during the first 15 days of the term you forfeit your right to reschedule.

### **Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Integrity**

Please don't cheat. Seriously, do not do it. It's not worth it and will be a big headache for both of us. It's really just easier, and far more beneficial, to do the work.

Every BSC student has agreed under the Honor Code, "not to give or receive aid unfairly or dishonestly in any academic work or in any way act dishonestly in any student activity."

Academic dishonesty is a violation of the Honor Code and will not be tolerated. If you are unsure as to whether a particular act will violate the Honor Code and be in any way academically dishonest, do not hesitate to ask me for clarification. Should an act of academic dishonesty take place, everyone involved will receive a zero on the assignment. In addition, depending on the severity, the act of academic dishonesty may be taken before the Honors Council and additional sanctions pursued.

### **Office of Accessibility/Accommodations**

If you have completed the process to receive academic accommodations with the Office of Accessibility, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations. If you have a disability but have not contacted the Office of Accessibility, please contact them as soon as possible at one of the following email addresses: awsmith@bsc.edu or accessibility@bsc.edu. If you prefer to call the office, the number is (205) 226-7909.

### **Academic Freedom**

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

### **BSC Resources for Writers and Readers**

The Writing Center is located in Hum. 102, and it has a new structure and vibe this year. Two graduate student coordinators will be on site at all times the Writing Center is open to supervise peer tutors and to conduct tutorials themselves, as needed. We will be open Sunday-Thursday late afternoon and evenings, and students do not need an appointment. Tutorials are about 30 minutes long, free of charge, and available on a drop-in basis. Tutors will not proofread or "fix" student papers. They will provide one-on-one consultation about writing issues--small and large--for any student from any major at any point in the writing process. There is no limit to how many tutorials a student may attend. We are here to help!

### **Technology**

Technology's great. It has made us more efficient as a people and has provided humankind with more ability and power than we've ever had before. But, the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other electronic devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but research has shown that we learn more when we take notes by hand:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>

Thus, you may not use electronic devices in class. However, should you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me and we can make accommodations as necessary.

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

(Note: This is subject to change at the will of the instructor as the semester progresses)

### ***Part I: Defining and Measuring Public Opinion***

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

*Tuesday 2/4:*

- Reading
  - None! Get a head start on Thursday's readings.
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 2/6: What is Public Opinion? What is its Role in our Society?*

- Reading
  - V.O. Key. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf. Pp. 3-18.
  - Leopore, Jill. "Politics and the New Machine," *The New Yorker*. November 6.
  - Clawson and Oxley, Chpt 1.
- Due
  - Nothing

#### **Week 2: What is An Opinion?; Measuring Public Opinion**

*Tuesday 2/11: What is an Opinion? What is the Role of Information?*

- Reading
  - Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Pp. 6-28.
  - Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts vs. Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections," *American Political Science Review*, 88(1): 63-76.
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 2/13: Measuring Public Opinion – The Basics of Survey Research (no discussion signup)*

- Reading
  - Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Pp. 28-39
  - Clawson and Oxley, pp. 27-40
- Due
  - First in-class quiz today on Week 2 readings

#### **Week 3: Measuring Public Opinion (no discussion leading signup this week)**

*Tuesday 2/18: Measuring Public Opinion – Questionnaire Design, Survey Mode, and Non-Response*

- Reading
  - Asher, Herbert. 2001. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. Chapter 8.
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 2/20: Measuring Public Opinion – Representativeness & Interpreting Surveys*

- Reading

- Pew Research Center. 2012. "Assessing the Representativeness of Public Opinion Surveys." Pp 1-25.
- Pew Research Center. 2017. "What Low Response Rates Mean for Telephone Surveys."
- Due
  - Quiz 2, Week 3 readings, in class

#### Week 4: Are Our Opinions Fit to Study?

*Tuesday 2/25: In-Class Public Opinion & Paper Workshop (no discussion sign-up)*

- Reading
  - None
- Due
  - Project proposal due. Come prepared to briefly present your paper idea to the class.

*Thursday 2/27: Opinions vs. Attitudes*

- Reading
  - Luskin, Robert. 2002. "From Denial to Extenuation (and Finally Beyond): Political Sophistication and Citizen Performance." In James H. Kuklinski (ed.), *Thinking About Political Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 281-301
  - Bartels, Larry M. 2003. "Democracy with Attitudes." In Michael B. MacKuen and George Rabinowitz (eds.), *Electoral Democracy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Due
  - Quiz 3, Week 4 readings, in class

### ***Part II: Why Would You Think That?! The Sources of Our Opinions***

#### Week 5: Political Socialization Pt. I

*Tuesday 3/3: Blame Mom and Dad*

- Reading
  - Jennings, Kent M. and Richard Niemi. 1968. "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child," *American Political Science Review* 62(1): 169-184.
  - Jennings, Kent M. Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined," *The Journal of Politics*, 71(3): 782-799.
- Due
  - Nothing due.

*Thursday 3/5: Seriously, it's Mom and Dad*

- Reading
  - Iyengar, Shanto, Tobias Konitzer, and Kent Tedin. 2018. "The Home as a Political Fortress; Family Agreement in an Era of Polarization," *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4): 1326-1338.
  - Jenkins, Clinton M. 2019. "From Parents We Gain a Citizen: Successful Socialization and Political Constraint on Adolescent Development of Civic

Competencies,” Paper Presented at the 2019 Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference. Chicago, IL.

- Due
  - Quiz 4, Week 5 readings, in class

#### Week 6: Political Socialization Pt. II and The News Media

*Tuesday 3/10: Major Events*

- Reading
  - Erickson, Robert S. and Laura Stoker. 2013. “Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes.” *American Political Science Review*, 105 (2): 221-237.
  - Stoker, Laura and Kent Jennings. 1995. "Life-Cycle Transitions and Political Participation: The Case of Marriage," *American Political Science Review*, 89 (2): 421-433.)
- Due
  - Nothing due

*Thursday 3/12: The News Media*

- Reading
  - Clawson and Oxley, Chapters 3 and pp. 118-125 (the discussion of Zaller’s Receive-Accept-Sample model).
  - Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago. pp. 133-153 (Chapter 6, “Media Distortions: Causes and Consequences”).
  - Hayes, Danny. 2013. “How the Media Is Killing the Death Penalty.” Wonkblog, March 17. Online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2013/03/17/how-the-media-iskilling-the-death-penalty/>
- Due
  - Quiz 5, Week 6 readings, in class

#### Week 7: Racial and Ethnic Identities

*Tuesday 3/17: Racial and Ethnic Identities Pt. I*

- Reading
  - Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 7 + pp. 284-291.
  - Tesler, Michael. 2012. “The Spillover of Racialization into Evaluations of Bo Obama.” Model Politics Blog (April 10)
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 3/19: Racial and Ethnic Identities Pt. II*

- Reading
  - Tesler, Michael. 2012. “The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Racial Attitudes and Race.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 56 (3): 690-704.
  - Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. “What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and

Immigration Threat.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 690-704.

- Due
  - Quiz 6, Week 7 readings, in class

#### Week 8: Spring Break

*Tuesday 3/24: Take a break*

- Reading
  - None
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 3/26: Seriously, chill out*

- Reading
  - Nadda
- Due
  - Still nothing

#### Week 9: Rationality vs. Emotionality

*Tuesday 3/31: The Role of Self Interest*

- Reading
  - Clawson and Oxley, pp. 173-179.
  - Bartels, Larry. 2004. “Unenlightened Self-Interest: The Strange Appeal of the Estate Tax Repeal,” *The American Prospect* 15 (6): A17-A19.
  - Green, Donald and Ann Elizabeth Gerken. 1989. “Self-Interest and Public Opinion toward Smoking Restrictions and Cigarette Taxes.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 53(1): 1-16.
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 3/2: “Symbolic Politics”*

- Reading
  - Sears, David. O. 1993. “Symbolic Politics: A Socio-Political Theory.” In Shanto Iyengar and William J. McGuire (eds.), *Explorations in Political Psychology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
  - TBD
- Due
  - Quiz 7, Week 9 readings, in class

### **Part III: The Contours of Public Opinion**

#### Week 10: War and Foreign Policy; Climate Change and Global Warming

*Tuesday 4/7: War and Foreign Policy*

- Reading
  - Jacobson, Gary C. 2007. *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman. Chapter 6, “Illusion, Disillusion, and Faith in the President after ‘Mission Accomplished,’), pp. 119-162.

- Berinsky, Adam. J. 2007. "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict," *The Journal of Politics*, 69 (4): 975-997.
- Due
  - Nothing due

*Thursday 4/9: Climate Change and Global Warming*

- Reading
  - Pew Research Center. TBD.
  - Egan, Patrick J. and Megan Mullin. 2012. "Turning Personal Experience into Political Attitudes: The Effect of Local Weather on Americans' Perceptions about Global Warming," *The Journal of Politics*, 74 (3): 796-809.
- Due
  - Quiz 8, Week 10 readings, in class

Week 11: Trust In Government; Ideology and Political Polarization Pt. I

*Tuesday 4/14: Government Trust*

- Reading
  - Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 11
  - Hibbing, John and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 129-159. (Chapter 6, "Americans' Desire for Stealth Democracy").
- Due
  - Nothing due

*Thursday 4/16: Affective and Ideological Polarization*

- Reading
  - Lelkes, Yphtach. 2016. "Mass Polarization: Manifestation and Measurements." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80 (S1) 392-410.
  - Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly*.
- Due
  - Quiz 9, Week 11 readings, in class

Week 12: Ideology and Political Polarization Pt. II

*Tuesday 4/21: Operational Ideology*

- Reading
  - Stimson and Ellis, Chpts 1, 2, 3
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 4/23: Symbolic Ideology and the Operational-Symbolic Disconnect*

- Reading
  - Stimson and Ellis, Chpts 4 and 5
- Due
  - Quiz 10, Week 12 readings, in class

## **Part IV: Does the Government Listen to the Governed?**

### **Week 13: Ideology and Polarization Pt. III; The Opinion-Policy Link Pt. I**

*Tuesday 4/28: Conservatism*

- Reading
  - Stimson and Ellis, Chpts. 6 and 7
- Due
  - Nothing

*Thursday 4/30: Opinion – Policy Pt. I*

- Reading
  - Clawson and Oxley, Chpt. 12
  - Stimson and Ellis, Chpt. 8
- Due
  - Quiz 11, Week 13 readings, in class

### **Week 14: The Opinion Policy Link Pt. II**

*Tuesday 5/5: Ideology and Political Outcomes*

- Reading
  - Gilens, Martin. 2005. “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(5): 778-796.
  - Gilens, Martin and Benjamin Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3): 564-581.
  - Sides, John. 2015. “New Research Shows Just How Much Presidents Try to Manipulate Public Opinion,” *The Monkey Cage*.
- Due
  - Final paper due

*Thursday 5/7:*

- No class, Honors Day