

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICS
University of South Carolina

GINT 350 (Honors)
Spring, 2003
Office Hours, Tuesday and Thursday
1:00 - 2:00 p.m. and by appointment

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Public opinion is an essential component in many theories of representative democracy. Yet, early empirical research on mass beliefs questioned the existence of an informed, rational public, and raised considerable doubts over the prospects for creating a more “deliberative democracy.” However, research over the last twenty years, which has been greatly informed by advances cognitive and social psychology, has expanded our understanding of the origins, manifestations, and consequences of public opinion. Can public opinion play the role we expect of it?

This course is designed to introduce the student to the contemporary study of public opinion. Though potential topics for this course are vast, we will concentrate our attention on four main questions: What is public opinion? What are the forces affecting the formation of public opinion? What is the distribution of opinion on major issues and towards government? And, what are the consequences of public opinion in modern politics? Students will be expected to develop an understanding of the theoretical nature of public opinion and convey this understanding through class participation, written assignments, and two examinations. In order to stimulate class discussion and learning, you will be expected to complete the assigned readings *before* class sessions (I have no problem with calling on people to participate).

REQUIREMENTS:

Texts: The following texts have been ordered through the Russell House Textbook Store and are required for the course:

McClosky, Herbert, and John Zaller. 1984. *The American Ethos: Public Attitudes toward Capitalism and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Norrander, Barbara, and Clyde Wilcox. 2002. *Understanding Public Opinion*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Sniderman, Paul M., Richard A. Brody, and Philip E. Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

A course packet of readings is available on reserve at both the Thomas Cooper Library.

Assignments and Grading:

- 1) Students are to read all required material before class sessions.
- 2) Examinations: Midterm (20%) and Final (40%)
- 3) Written Assignments: Two 5-8 page papers (30%)
- 4) Class Attendance and Participation (10%)

Undoubtedly, some of you will find the material covered in this class difficult to grasp. The readings, lectures, discussions, and assignments have been compiled to make understanding public opinion an easier task. However, if at any time you feel confused by the material, please feel free to seek my help during office hours or by appointment.

A webpage for this class has been established:

<http://www.cla.sc.edu/gint/faculty/gomezbt/>

REQUIRED READINGS

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| 14 Jan | About the Course: Democracy and Public Opinion |
| 16 | What is Public Opinion? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wilcox and Norrander, "Introduction: The Diverse Paths to Understand Public Opinion" (N&W)• Lippmann, Ch. 1 (Reserve)• Zaller, Chs. 1 and 2• Sniderman, "The New Look in Public Opinion," pp. 218-223 (Reserve) |
| 21 | Public Opinion Polling and Survey Response <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Norrander and Wilcox, "Appendix: A Primer on Statistics and Public Opinion" (N&W) |
| 23 | Public Opinion Polling and Survey Response, cont. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zaller, Chs. 3 and 4 |
| 28 | Public Opinion Polling and Survey Response, cont. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zaller, Chs. 3 and 4 |
| 30 | Mass Belief Systems: The "Innocence of Ideology" Thesis <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (Reserve) |

- 04 Feb Mass Belief Systems: The “Innocence of Ideology” Thesis, cont.
- Sniderman, “The New Look in Public Opinion,” pp. 223-225 (Reserve)
 - Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 8
- 06 Individual Cognition
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 1
- 11 Individual Cognition
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 2
 - Zaller, Ch. 5
- 13 Individual Cognition: Core Values
- Sniderman, “The New Look in Public Opinion,” pp. 225-228
 - Feldman, “Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values” (Reserve)
 - Jacoby, “Core Values and Political Attitudes” (N&W)
- 18 Individual Cognition: Core Values
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Chs. 3 and 7
- 20 Democratic Norms and Values
- McClosky and Zaller, *The American Ethos*, Chs. 1-7 and 9.
- WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT #1 – DUE**
- 25 Democratic Norms and Values, cont.
- McClosky and Zaller, *The American Ethos*, Chs. 1-7 and 9.
- 27 **MID-TERM EXAMINATION**
- 04 Mar Influences on Public Opinion: Rationality and Self-Interest
- Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, pp. 207-259 (Reserve)
 - Brewer, “Public Opinion, Economic Issues, and the Vote: Are Presidential Elections “All About the Benjamins?” (N&W)
 - Gomez and Wilson, “Political Sophistication and Economic Voting in the American Electorate: A Theory of Heterogeneous Attribution.” (Reserve)
- 06 Influences on Public Opinion: Information
- Zaller, Chs. 7-9

- 11 HOLIDAY – *Spring Break!!!*
- 13 HOLIDAY – *Spring Break!!!*
- 18 Influences of Public Opinion: Emotions
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 6
- 20 Influences on Public Opinion: The Media
- Iyengar and Prior, “Giving Advertising a Bad Name: The Effect of Political Ads on Commercial Advertising” (N&W)
 - Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*, pp. 1-16; 46-68; 127-143 (Reserve)
- 25 Influences on Public Opinion: The Media, cont.
- Iyengar and Prior, “Giving Advertising a Bad Name: The Effect of Political Ads on Commercial Advertising” (N&W)
 - Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*, pp. 1-16; 46-68; 127-143 (Reserve)
- 27 Expressions of Public Opinion: Abortion Attitudes
- Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, Ch. 8 (Reserve)
 - Alvarez and Brehm, “American Ambivalence Toward Abortion Policy” *AJPS* 39:1055-82 (Reserve)
 - Wilcox and Norrander, “Of Moods and Morals: The Dynamics of Opinion on Abortion and Gay Rights” (N&W) [*Recommended*]
- 01 Apr Expressions of Public Opinion: Racial Attitudes
- Sniderman, “The New Look in Public Opinion,” pp. 230-233
 - Carmines and Sniderman, “The Structure of Racial Attitudes: Issue Pluarlism and the Changing Dilemma” (N&W)
 - Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America*, Chs. 3& 5 (Reserve)
- 03 Expressions of Public Opinion: Racial Attitudes, cont.
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Chs. 4 and 11-13
- 08 Public Opinion and Electoral Choice
- Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 9
 - Zaller, Ch. 10
 - Abramowitz and Saunders, “Ideological Realignment and U.S. Congressional Elections” (N&W)

- 10 Trust (Or Should I Say, Distrust) in Government
- Rahn and Rudolph, "Trust in Local Governments" (N&W)
 - Hibbing, "The People's Craving for Unselfish Government" (N&W)
- 15 Governmental Responsiveness: Is Anyone Listening?
- McGraw, "Manipulating Public Opinion" (N&W)
 - Madsen, "Political Self-efficacy Tested." (Reserve)
 - Brace & Hinckley, Follow the Leader, Chs. 1-4 (Reserve) [*Recommended*]

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT #2 -- DUE

- 17 No Class – Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association
- 22 Macro-level Decision-Making: A "Rational Public?"
- Page and Shapiro, The Rational Public, Ch. 1 (Reserve)
- 24 Public Opinion and Democracy
- Zaller, Ch. 12
 - Brady, Schlozman, Verba, and Elms, "Who Bowls? The (Un)Changing Stratification of Participation" (N&W)
 - Mishler and Rose, "Public Support for Post-Communist Transitions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union" (N&W)
- 29 LAST DAY OF CLASS -- Review for Final Examination

Final Examination – Tuesday, May 6, 2003 @ 9:00 a.m.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESERVE READINGS

- Alvarez, R. Michael, and John Brehm. 1994. "American Ambivalence Toward Abortion Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 39:1055-82.
- Brace, Paul, and Barbara Hinckley. 1992. *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*. New York: Basic Books.
- Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In David E. Apter, ed. *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 1995. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact*, 5th ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Feldman, Stanley. 1988. "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values." *American Journal of Political Science* 32:416-440.
- Gomez, Brad T., and J. Matthew Wilson. 2001. "Political Sophistication and Economic Voting in the American Electorate: A Theory of Heterogeneous Attribution." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:899-914.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1994. *Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lippmann, Walter. "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." Chapter One in *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press.
- Luker, Kristin. 1985. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Madsen, Douglas. 1987. "Political Self-efficacy Tested." *American Political Science Review* 81:571-582.
- Markus, Gregory B. 1988. "The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on the Presidential Vote: A Pooled Cross-sectional Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 33:137-154.
- Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schuman, Howard, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo. 1985. *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sniderman, Paul. 1993. "The New Look in Public Opinion Research." In Ada W. Finifter, ed. *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*. Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association.