

PSC 2220
PUBLIC OPINION

Fall 2015
T + Th, 11:10 am-12:25 pm
Hall of Government 101

Professor Danny Hayes
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Monroe 471
T + Th, 2:00-3:30 pm and by appointment
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COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

In a democracy, the views of citizens are expected to guide government activity and the creation of public policy. That makes public opinion a central concern in the study of democratic politics. In this course, we will endeavor to answer a variety of questions related to U.S. public opinion: Where do political attitudes come from, and how much do people really know about politics anyway? Do people make political judgments on the basis of their material self-interest, or do more abstract values shape their attitudes? Do Sean Hannity, Rachel Maddow, and their media ilk influence public opinion? If so, how so? Is the American public polarized? What explains people's views of war, climate change, and other prominent issues? And finally, what is the connection between mass opinion, on one hand, and public policy outcomes, on the other? Does the government listen to the governed?

In the end, the course has five goals:

- To help you understand how people form attitudes about political issues and events
- To help you understand why sometimes public policy reflects the public's will, and sometimes it does not
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about political behavior
- To help you learn to collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative data about Americans' political attitudes
- To help you become a savvy consumer of public opinion data, which the news media will continue to bombard you with for the rest of your life

READING

There is one required book for this course, available at the GW Bookstore:

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

The majority of the other required readings—mostly journal articles and book chapters—are available for download through our course's Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.gwu.edu>). On the left-hand menu, click the "Files" link, and then click the "Course Readings" folder. Here, you'll find PDF versions of each week's readings. It will be your responsibility to download the items as they are assigned. It might be worthwhile to print the readings early in the semester, which will keep you from having to do this every week. Any remaining readings are available online, with the URLs in the course schedule below.

Finally, it should come as no surprise that you are expected to keep up with political news. Our discussions will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate a concept from lecture or a reading. Regularly consuming the news will not only bring course material to life, but it will undoubtedly make the class more interesting. (And as a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Your grade will be based on regular quizzes, a research paper, and a final exam:

- Quizzes: 50%
- Research paper: 30%
- Final exam: 20%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following 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+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59).

There is no extra credit.

Quizzes

We will have 12 quizzes throughout the semester, always on Thursdays. Because I will drop your 2 lowest scores—a pair of get-out-of-jail-free cards—there are no makeups. If you miss a quiz, that’s one I will drop.

Here’s how the quizzes will work: Each will consist of five questions about the assigned readings. Showing up to take the quiz earns you 25 points. Each question is worth 15 points. If you answer four questions correctly, for instance, you would receive an 85. The quizzes will not be particularly difficult, but you will do well only if you keep up with the reading assignments. Here are the quiz dates and the readings you will be responsible for:

9/10 C&O, Ch. 1; Key; Zaller	10/22 C&O, Ch. 3 and pp. 118-125; Gilens; Nelson et al.
9/17 C&O, pp. 27-40; Asher; Zaller; Bump	10/29 Hayes; Hetherington; Iyengar et al.
9/24 C&O, Ch. 2; Jennings and Niemi; Erikson and Stoker	11/5 Jacobson; Berinsky; Hayes and Guardino
10/1 C&O, Ch. 5, 8; Lupia	11/12 Pew; Egan and Mullin; Boykoff
10/8 Gilens; Bartels; C&O, pp. 173-179; Green and Gerken; Sears	11/19 Brooks; Hayes and Lawless
10/15 C&O, Ch. 7 and pp. 284-291; Tesler; Brader et al.; Pew	12/3 Pew; C&O, Ch. 12; Gilens; Gilens and Page; Sides

Research Paper

You will also conduct an original research project. For the assignment, you will both collect and analyze public opinion data about an issue. The specific topic will be of your choosing, but I will provide guidelines for the paper within the first few weeks of the semester. We will also have an in-class “workshop” September 29 to give you guidance on how to collect public opinion data from a variety of online sources. The paper (10 pages) is due in class **November 12**.

Missing the due date will cost you 5 points for each day the paper is late. For example, if you turn in your paper three days late, you can score no higher than an 85. These deductions are not negotiable.

Final Exam

At the end of the semester, you will take a exam that will assess whether you have acquired a basic knowledge of public opinion. The final will consist of essay questions. It will be cumulative – that is, you will be asked to draw on material from the entire semester. I will hand out a study guide before the final. The exam will be worth 20% of your grade.

A makeup exam will be given only in extreme circumstances, such as illness or family emergency. In order to qualify for a makeup, you must (1) notify me *before* the exam and (2) provide documentation of the illness or emergency. If you fail to do either of these things, you will not be eligible to take a makeup.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Thinking about cheating? Don't do it. All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>.

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.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

GW’s Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by

injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Additional information is available at www.gwu.edu/~dss.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

If a quiz, exam or assignment is scheduled for a date when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.

SHOULD THERE BE AN ALIEN INVASION OR SOME SUCH

If we experience an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave the classroom, we will meet in front of the Hall of Government on G Street to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is great. (How else would we get the cat videos?) 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. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please talk to me.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to change as we proceed through the semester.)

September 1: Course introduction

September 3: No class

PART 1: DEFINING AND MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

September 8, 10: What is public opinion?

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 1
- Key, V.O. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. pp. 3-18 (“Introduction”).
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. pp. 6-28.

September 15, 17: Basics of Survey Research

- Clawson & Oxley, pp. 27-40

- Asher, Herbert. 2012. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 205-236 (Chapter 8, “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls”).
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. pp. 28-39.
- Bump, Philip. 2015. “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about How Washington Post Polling Works.” *Washington Post*. Online at : http://www.washingtonpost.com/rweb/politics/everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-washington-post-polling-works/2015/07/24/82f1deccad751b576f29ccd8ebd185e5_story.html.

PART 2: WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT? THE SOURCES OF ATTITUDES

September 22, 24: Blame Mom and Dad: Political socialization (and genes?)

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 2
- 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. 2013. “Caught in the Draft: The Effects of Vietnam Draft Lottery Status on Political Attitudes.” *American Political Science Review* 105(2): 221-237.

September 29: Collecting public opinion data: An in-class workshop. (Bring your laptop.)

October 1, 6: Ideological “innocence,” heuristics, and information

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 5
- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 8
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. “Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63-76.
- Gilens, Martin. 2001. “Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences.” *American Political Science Review* 95(2): 379-396.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2008. “The Irrational Electorate.” *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn. Online at http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/how_stupid.pdf.

October 8: Rationality and emotionality: Self-interest vs. “symbolic politics”

- Clawson & Oxley, pp. 173-179
- Green, Donald Philip, and Ann Elizabeth Gerken. 1989. “Self-Interest and Public Opinion toward Smoking Restrictions and Cigarette Taxes.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53(1): 1-16.

- Sears, David O. 1993. "Symbolic Politics: A Socio-Psychological Theory." In Shanto Iyengar and William J. McGuire (eds.), *Explorations in Political Psychology*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 113-149.

October 13, 15: Race and ethnicity

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 7 and pp. 284-291
- 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): 959-978.
- Pew Research Center. 2014. "Ferguson Highlights Deep Division between Blacks and Whites." November 26. Online at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/26/ferguson-highlights-deep-divisions-between-blacks-and-whites-in-america/>.

October 20, 22, 27: 90-pound weakling or 800-pound gorilla? Media effects on political attitudes

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 3 and pp. 118-125
- 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").
- Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review* 91(3): 567-583.
- 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-is-killing-the-death-penalty/>.

PART 3: THE CONTOURS OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC OPINION

October 29: How polarized is the American public?

- Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 39(2): 413-448.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3): 405-431.

November 3, 5: War and foreign policy

- Jacobson, Gary C. 2007. *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman. pp. 119-162 (Chapter 6, “Illusion, Disillusion, and Faith in the President after ‘Mission Accomplished’”).
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2007. “Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict.” *Journal of Politics* 69(4): 975-997.
- Hayes, Danny, and Matt Guardino. 2011. “The Influence of Foreign Voices on U.S. Public Opinion.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55(4): 830-850.

November 10, 12: Climate change and global warming

- Pew Research Center. 2012. “More Say There Is Solid Evidence of Global Warming.” October 15. Online at: <http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/15/more-say-there-is-solid-evidence-of-global-warming/>.
- Egan, Patrick J., and Megan Mullin. 2012. “Turning Personal Experience into Political Attitudes: The Effect of Local Weather on Americans’ Perceptions about Global Warming.” *Journal of Politics* 74(3): 796-809.
- Boykoff, Mawell T. 2008. “Lost in Translation? United States Television News Coverage of Anthropogenic Climate Change.” *Climactic Change* 86(1-2): 1-11.
- RESEARCH PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 12

November 17, 19: Perceptions of female politicians

- Brooks, Deborah Jordan. 2011. “Testing the Double Standard for Candidate Emotionality: Voter Reactions to the Tears and Anger of Male and Female Politicians.” *Journal of Politics* 73(2): 597-615.
- Hayes, Danny, and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2015. “A Non-Gendered Lens? Media, Voters, and Female Candidates in Contemporary Congressional Elections.” *Perspectives on Politics* 13(1): 95-118.

November 24: Guns and gun control

- Pew Research Center. 2015. “A Public Opinion Trend That Matters: Priorities for Gun Policy.” January 9. Online at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/>

PART 4: IS THE GOVERNMENT LISTENING? TO WHOM?

December 1, 3, 8: The Ludacris test and the opinion-policy link

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 12

- 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*. Online at:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/09/new-research-shows-just-how-much-presidents-try-to-manipulate-public-opinion/>.

December 15, 10:20am: Final exam