

PS 473G
Public Opinion
Fall, 2011
TR 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM
Classroom Building 245

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& by appointment
My [website](#)

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Blackboard

All the materials for the class can be found in Blackboard. The syllabus contains mostly static content. Changes will be announced in Blackboard, along with new materials, such as lecture outlines, exam review questions, written assignments, and so on.

DESCRIPTION (*longer description is linked*)

This course will examine public opinion and its role in the American political system. We will focus on trying to understand how public opinion is shaped as well as how public opinion impacts politics and governing. While we will examine research on the current state of public opinion, we will also focus on historical developments in opinion, including changes that arose with the development of polling and with the advent of television and other electronic media. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion should play in American democracy.

Required Books to Purchase

Several texts are part of the required reading for this course, all of which are available at the university bookstores and online sources.

- Herbert Asher. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 8th Ed. CQ Press, 2010. (the 7th edition should be fine, also).
- Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler. *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Adam Berinsky. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. Chicago, 2009.
- Larry Bartels. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, 2010.

Also, students should **purchase a TurningPoint Clicker** at one of the university bookstores.

Course Requirements

1. **Grades and Examinations:** your final course grade will be based on the following criteria:

- Midterm (October 11) -- 35% of Grade
- Final Exam (December 15) -- 40%
- Written Assignments -- 15%
- Attendance & Participation -- 10%

2. **Reading:** All of the reading in this syllabus is **required**. You should read all of the assigned material before the class period for which it is assigned, be prepared to discuss it in class, and also be prepared to be examined on it **even if it is not discussed in class**. Our class time **will not** be spent simply "going over" the assigned readings. Rather, the readings will serve as our point of departure for the lectures and class discussion. Indeed, most lectures will involve information not contained in the readings. So please do the readings for each class on a timely basis. You have been warned.

3. **Written Assignments:** There will be 3-4 short (4 page) written assignments designed to help students analyze public opinion data and apply many of the ideas in the course to the "real world." We will also create our own online survey and administer it later in the course. The written assignments cannot be turned in late, except for university excused absences.

4. **Exams:** There will be two exams given during the course of the semester – a midterm and a noncumulative final given during final exam week. The bulk of both exams will consist of multiple-choice questions, with 2-3 short essays. You are required to bring two (2) #2 pencils (already sharpened) with an

eraser, as well as pen and paper for the essay portion. Review questions for each exam, as well as PowerPoints for lectures covered by each exam, may be found on the course Blackboard site, usually about a week before the exam. If you need to reschedule the final exam (see <http://www.uky.edu/Registrar/finalspring.htm> for acceptable reasons for this), you are required by university regulations to submit your request in writing to me **at least two weeks prior to the Final Exam**. Makeup exams will be given only for university-excused absences or if you have obtained approval prior to the absence. If you miss an exam with an unexcused absence **you will receive a zero for the exam**. If the absence is due to a foreseen reason, written verification will be required at least one week before the scheduled exam. Permission to miss an exam must be secured BEFORE the scheduled exam time unless the cause of the absence is unforeseen. If the exam must be missed due to an unforeseen reason, it is your responsibility to contact me ASAP following the exam (by email or in person), but in no event later than one week following the absence.

3. Attendance & Participation: Regardless of what you may have heard, attendance is very important for success in most college courses. This is especially true for my courses. A great amount of the lecture material will not appear in the course readings, and you are responsible for all information presented in the lectures. Moreover, the lectures will provide important clues as to what things are likely to show up on the examinations. It is highly unlikely that you will do well in this course without regular and engaged attendance.

Class participation is 10% of the grade and will definitely influence borderline grades. Students who do not feel comfortable participating in class discussions can earn participation credit by submitting a 1-2 page typed summary of the class discussions at the end of each week. Also, the assigned readings should not be viewed as absolute truth. Read the material thoughtfully, challenge the conclusions of the authors, and voice your concerns in class. Students should feel free to raise questions concerning the readings, the lectures, and the comments of other students. In other words, meaningful participation is strongly encouraged and will, no doubt, enhance the quality of our class sessions.

A TurningPoint radio frequency (RF) clicker is REQUIRED for this course. We will be using the clickers to take attendance, give quizzes, take polls and otherwise facilitate class participation. It is your responsibility to purchase a TurningPoint clicker for class. Other brands of clickers will not work for this course. If you have already purchased a TurningPoint RF clicker for another class or during a previous semester, you may use that device for this course. You **MUST** bring your clicker to class every day. If you forget your clicker during any class period, you may receive attendance credit by signing a form at the beginning of class (please see the TA for this), but you will not be able to receive any participation credit for the day.

If you are having trouble with your clicker, please see me or your TA **BEFORE** class and we will test it. If your clicker breaks or needs a new battery during the semester, it is your responsibility to replace them in a timely fashion. You can do this through the bookstores or the TurningPoint website. Please take good care of your clicker – you are responsible for keeping up with it and keeping it in good working condition. **You are to use only the clicker that you have registered for your individual use for this course.** Use of anyone else's clicker will constitute cheating, and if discovered, you will receive a 0 for your attendance & participation grade for the semester. You must **register** your individual Device ID number (a six character, case-sensitive code found immediately below the barcode on the back of your clicker) on Blackboard by 12am, September 8. If you have already registered your clicker on Blackboard for another class during this or a previous semester, it should still be registered. Please verify your Device ID for yourself on Blackboard. If your clicker is not registered by the 12am September 8 deadline, you will receive no class participation credit for each day it is not registered.

There will be a Daily Attendance Question worth one point during each class period beginning on September 8. Attendance credit will not be given if you arrive late or leave early from class, or leave and return during class, or are otherwise not present while the Daily Attendance Question is presented. Your attendance grade (5% of your final course grade) will be determined as a percentage of your total number of earned participation points out of 18 points. That percentage will then be used to calculate 5% of your final course grade. **Because this effectively means you get to drop 2 days worth of class participation without penalty (for whatever reason), there will be NO makeup attendance opportunities given for either excused or unexcused absences or for tardiness/leaving early/leaving & reentering class.** A varying

number of in-class participation questions worth 1 point each will be presented during each class session beginning on September 8. Your participation grade will be determined by taking the percentage of the number of in-class participation questions you answer out of the total number of questions presented during the semester. That percentage will then be used to calculate 5% of your final course grade. There will be no make-up possible for in-class participation. Thus, your regular attendance and participation in class using your TurningPoint RF clickers is extremely important.

TENTATIVE READING LIST (IT WILL CHANGE, SO STAY TUNED TO BLACKBOARD)

I. Introduction to the Course

August 25: Welcome and introduction to the course: Fascinating! Must see to believe!

What are attitudes & opinions, what functions do they serve, and how should they be studied?

II. Democratic Competence & Survey Research

August 30: *What Role Should Public Opinion Play in Democratic Government?*

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 1 & 2.

Lecture Outlines: [Normative Bases of Public Opinion](#)

September 1: Video: "Boogey Man: The Lee Atwater Story"

September 6: Sampling and Data Collection (John Poe)

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 4 & 5.

September 8: How Sophisticated is Public Opinion?

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 2.

Further reading (not required): "Dunce Cap Nation." *Newsweek*. September 4, 2007.

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/39529>

September 13: Methods for Studying Public Opinion

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 3.

Written Assignment I (due September 22).

September 15: Analyzing Public Opinion

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 6 & 7.

Handout for Analyzing Public Opinion Data

III. The Organization of Public Opinion & Polarization

September 20: The Organization of Public Opinion & Polarization

Hetherington & Weiler, chapters 1 & 2.

Written Assignment I due

September 22: Authoritarianism and Public Opinion

Hetherington & Weiler, chapters 3 to 6.

September 27, 29: Groups and Public Opinion

Hetherington & Weiler, chapters 7 to 10.

October 4, 6: Do-It-Yourself Analysis of Public Opinion (John Poe)

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 8.

Handout for Analyzing Public Opinion Data

Written Assignment II (due October 11)

October 11: Midterm Exam Review

Review Questions for Midterm (posted 1 week before exam)

Written Assignment II due

October 13: Midterm Exam

October 18: Video: "Sex & Violence!"

IV. External Sources of Public Opinion: The Mass Media, Events and Opinion Leadership

October 20: Persuasion & Propaganda

Berinsky, *In Time of War*, chapters 1-4.

Lecture Outline: Persuasion & Propaganda

October 25: Public Opinion and News Media

Berinsky, *In Time of War*, chapter 5.

Lecture Outline: Public Opinion & News Media

October 27: Video or John Poe More Advanced Analysis

November 1: Public Opinion and War

Berinsky, *In Time of War*, chapters 6-9.

Lecture Outline: Berinsky Review Questions

Lecture Outline: In Time of War

V. Public Opinion and Public Policy: TBA

Read: Larry Bartels. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, chapters TBA

Nov. 24: Thanksgiving break!

Final Review Questions

Dec 8: Last Day of Class!

December 15: FINAL EXAMINATION: THURSDAY, 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM