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| Political Science 164  Public Opinion  MW 4:10-5:30  206 Olson | Winter 2014  S.L. Hill  Office: 570 Kerr Hall (752-0966)  Office Hours: M 2:00-3:30, T 10:30-12  and by appointment |

**SYLLABUS**

This course examines the role of public opinion in the American political system. As key actors in a representative democracy, U.S. citizens are supposed to play a decisive role in selecting their nation's political leaders and the policies those leaders enact into law. Political scientists have investigated how well this nation’s democratic ideals are currently fulfilled when the mass public competes with other interests for political influence.

We will begin our study of public opinion with the ultimate agents of the democratic state: its citizens. By what methods should their opinions be identified and measured? From where do their political attitudes originate and develop over time? What specific capabilities do they exhibit to fulfill their important political role? The answers to these questions will help us learn whether political campaigns serve to enlighten the nation’s citizens from political debate on the pressing issues of the day and help these individuals select the nation’s leaders and its policies. Once new leaders take political office will those in power draw upon public opinion for guidance in making the difficult choices that unexpectedly arise and pose questions that were not raised during the last election?

**Readings**: Robert Erikson and Kent Tedin, American Public Opinion (Pearson

Longman, 8th edition: 2011)

Selected readings (available in 2 readers available at the Davis Copy Shop at 232 3rd St. - corner of University Ave. and 3rd St.)

**Course Requirements:**

A. Examinations: Each student must take a midterm and a final examination. The midterm is scheduled for Monday, February 10 and the final will be held on Tuesday, March 18, from 10:30 am -12:30 pm. Make-up exams will be offered only for those students who cannot take the exams at the scheduled times for well documented reasons of health and personal emergency. All make-up exams will be more difficult than regularly scheduled examinations. Failure to take an exam or a make-up will constitute grounds for a failing grade for this course.

B. Paper on public opinion and public policy: Each student will prepare a paper of 10 double-spaced typed pages to explain the role public opinion played in an effort to pass a major public policy reform. The paper will identify the pattern of support or opposition of public opinion in light of the public's enduring political affiliations and the more immediate dynamics of elite debate. Students will draw on the political campaign over the issue in the preceding presidential and Congressional elections as well as the disagreements among political elites immediately prior to the government’s final decision on the proposed reform. Paper topics must be chosen and submitted to your TA for approval by Monday, February 3.

C. Grading: The following weights will be assigned to the course requirements in computing the final course grade: Midterm examination = 30%; Paper =35%, and Final examination = 35%. Incompletes will only be granted when there is a documented personal emergency and students have completed more than 50% of the course requirements with a grade of C- or better.

**Course Outline and Readings**

I. **Introduction** (January 6)

II. **Why study public opinion?** (January 8)

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chp. 1; Bernard Berelson et.al.,

Voting, chp. 14

III. **Science of public opinion research**. (January 13-15)

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chp. 2; W. Phillips Shively, The

Craft of Political Research, chp. 6

IV. **Capabilities of average citizens** (January 22-27)

A. Knowledge, ideology, and partisanship of individuals: micro politics

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chp. 3; Philip Converse,

"The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter, ed.,

Ideology and Discontent (Free Press, 1964).

B. Aggregating individual attitudes: macro politics

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chp. 4; Robert Erikson,

Michael Mackuen, and James Stimson, The Macro Polity (Cambridge, 2002), chps. 1 & 8.

V. **Distant sources of public opinion** (January 27-February 3)

A. Socialization and differential experience

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chps. 5-7; Anthony Downs, Economic Theory of Democracy, chps. 3, 12; Richard Niemi and

Kent Jennings, “Issues and Inheritance in the Formation of Party Identification,” American Journal of Political Science, 1991, pp. 970-988; David Sears and Nicholas Valentino, “Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization,” American Political Science Review,1997, pp. 45-65.

V. **Distant sources of public opinion cont’d** (January 27-February 3)

B. Self-interest vs. collective interest

Reading: Richard Nadeau and Michael Lewis-Beck, “National Economic

Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections,” The Journal of Politics 63

(February 2001) pp. 159-181; Donald Kinder, “Presidents, Prosperity,

and Public Opinion,” Public Opinion Quarterly 45 (Spring 1981),

pp. 1-21. Donald Green and Ann Gerken, “Self-Interest and Public

Opinion toward Smoking Restrictions and Cigarette Taxes.” Public

Opinion Quarterly. 1989, pp. 1-16

**Paper topics due**: Monday, February 3

VI. **Media effects** (February 5)

A. Agenda setting and priming

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chps. 8; Shanto Iyengar,

News that Matters (University of Chicago Press, 1987), chps 3 & 6

**Midterm:** Monday, February 10

B. Horse race journalism, gatekeeping, and handicapping (February 12)

Reading: Larry Bartels, Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice

(Princeton University Press: 1988), chps 3, 5; Larry Bartels, “Expectations and Preferences in Presidential Nominating Campaigns,” American Political Science Review 79 (September 1985), pp. 804-815; John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election

(Princeton University Press, 2013), chps 3, 4.

VII. **Immediate sources of public opinion: elite persuasion:** (February 19-24)

Reading: John Zaller, The Nature and Origin of Public Opinion (Cambridge University

Press, 1992), chps 2, 3; Erikson and Tedin, American Public Opinion, chps 9-10.

VIII. **Political rhetoric and campaign effects** (February 26-March 3)

Reading: Sunshine Hillygus and Todd Shields, The Persuadable Voter (Princeton

University Press: 2008), chps 1-2; Alan Abramowitz, “Forecasting in a Polarized Era: The Time for Change Model and the 2012 Presidential Election,” PS (2012), pp 618-19; Lynn Vavreck, The Message Matters (Princeton University Press: 2009) chps 2-3. Sides and Vavreck, The Gamble:

(Princeton University Press, 2013), chps 5,7.

IX. **Presidential rhetoric and governing** (March 5-10)

Reading: Brandice Canes-Wrone, Who Leads Whom (The University of Chicago Press: 2006), chp. 2-3; Brandice Canes-Wrone, “ John Zaller, “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science,” PS 31 (Jun., 1998), pp. 182-189; Forrest Maltzman et.al., “Unleashing Presidential Power: The Politics of Pets in the White House,” PS (2012), pp. 395-400.

X. **Rally-round-the-flag** (March 12)

Reading: Marc Hetherington and Michael Nelson, “Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George

Bush and the War on Terrorism.” *PS* 36 (January 2003); Matthew Baum, "Circling the Wagons: Soft News and Isolationism in American Public

Opinion," American Journal of Political Science 47 (January 2003), pp. 583- 596.

XI, **Pulling the threads together: 2008-2012 presidential elections** (March 17)

**Paper due**: Wednesday, March 12

**Final exam:** Tuesday, March 18, from 10:30 am -12:30 pm.