

Public opinion: Methods and meaning - Spring 2020

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This course is about how to understand and measure public opinion about political topics (e.g., the environment, the economy, ethnic groups), as well as people's evaluations of candidates and parties. We will read classic and new texts on where public opinion comes from, and what role it plays in the larger system of politics. Many concepts will be applicable to all developed democracies, but the evidence in this course will often come from the United States.

We will have two substantive modules and two methodological ones. The substantive modules will include the search for causes of public opinion (self-interest, social groups, parties and media), and for consequences of public opinion inside and outside the state. The methodological modules are about measuring and modeling public opinion, as well as designing and analyzing natural, field and survey experiments.

The course is designed to be interactive, and there will be only limited lecturing. Instead, you come to class with questions and thoughts about the readings, and ready to have in-depth discussions. Each week, before coming to class, I ask that you **submit two questions**. They can be clarification questions that you would like to have answered in the lecture part of class, or discussion questions that we will use in the interactive part of class (or one of each). These questions are due at **5 PM the day before** class. We will end each lecture with an introduction to next week's topics and readings.

Exam and simulation

The exam will be a take-home exam, with a question in the following format:

Read and critically reflect on each of the two attached papers, using the following prompts:

1. **Theory.** *What other theories of public opinion does this paper's theory build on or fit with? Which ones does it contradict or offer an alternative to? How plausible does this theory sound, given what else we know about politics and public opinion?*
2. **Evidence.** *Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence that the authors bring to their conclusions. Do the findings complement or contrast earlier knowledge? Are the methods (for example, measurement or causal inference strategies) a good match for the question? Are there problems or unanswered questions about the findings in this paper? Could a different design, or another future study, address these?*
3. **Implications.** *If we believe (or don't believe) the conclusions of the paper, what are the consequences for our theories about public opinion, for political science, and/or for the real world? In other words, why do these findings matter?*

The papers assigned in the exam will use methods and theories that we have discussed in class.

After we have finished the first two modules of the course, we will do an (ungraded) exam simulation. In a 72-hour period, you will write an answer to a question similar to the take-home exam question. We will discuss our answers in the next class meeting. I will publish my own answer for you to compare your answer to. There will be no readings assigned in the week of the simulation.

Part I: Observing public opinion

A. Measuring public opinion (February 3rd)

Fieldwork and surveys

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right*. The New Press, 2018. Chapter 1.

Zaller, John R. *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge university press, 1992. Chapter 5: Making it up as you go along.

Behavioral measures

Kahn, Matthew E., and Matthew J. Kotchen. "Environmental concern and the business cycle: The chilling effect of recession." No. w16241. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2010.

Jamal, Amaney A., Robert O. Keohane, David Romney, and Dustin Tingley. "Anti-Americanism and anti-interventionism in Arabic Twitter discourses." *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 1 (2015): 55-73.

B. Ideology and scaling (February 10th)

Theory

Feldman, Stanley. "Political ideology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, eds. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy. (2013). [can skim section 3]

Converse, Philip E. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter. New York: Free Press." (1964).

Evidence

Lauderdale, Benjamin E., Chris Hanretty, and Nick Vivyan. "Decomposing Public Opinion Variation into Ideology, Idiosyncrasy, and Instability." *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 2 (2018): 707-712.

Treier, Shawn, and D. Sunshine Hillygus. "The nature of political ideology in the contemporary electorate." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2009): 679-703.

Part II: Causes of public opinion

A. Groups and identity (February 24th)

Theory

Donald R Kinder. Belief Systems after Converse. In Michael MacKuen and George Rabinowitz, editors, *Electoral Democracy*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003. Pp. 13–47.

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Vol. 4. Princeton University Press, 2017. Chapter 8.

Evidence

Dinesen, Peter Thisted, and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov. "Ethnic diversity and social trust: Evidence from the micro-context." *American Sociological Review* 80, no. 3 (2015): 550-573.

Vandeweerd, C. (2019). In-group interest cues do not change issue attitudes. Under review.

B. Elite cueing and partisanship (March 2nd)

What it is

Zaller, John R. *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge university press, 1992. Chapter 3 [skip section How the Model is Used, p. 51] and Chapter 6 [skip section Alternative Explanations, p. 114].

Lenz, Gabriel S. *Follow the leader? How voters respond to politicians' policies and performance*. University of Chicago Press, 2013. Chapter 8. [skip sections 8.4 and 8.5]

When and why it works

Slothuus, Rune. "When can political parties lead public opinion? Evidence from a natural experiment." *Political Communication* 27, no. 2 (2010): 158-177.

Leeper, Thomas J., and Rune Slothuus. "Political parties, motivated reasoning, and public opinion formation." *Political Psychology* 35 (2014): 129-156.

C. Media, priming and framing (March 9th)

Media

Enikolopov, Ruben, Maria Petrova, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. "Media and political persuasion: Evidence from Russia." *American Economic Review* 101, no. 7 (2011): 3253-85.

Ladd, Jonathan McDonald, and Gabriel S. Lenz. "Exploiting a rare communication shift to document the persuasive power of the news media." *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 2 (2009): 394-410.

Priming and framing

Nelson, Thomas E., Zoe M. Oxley, and Rosalee A. Clawson. "Toward a psychology of framing effects." *Political Behavior* 19, no. 3 (1997): 221-246.

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. "Experimental demonstrations of the “not-so-minimal” consequences of television news programs." *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (1982): 848-858.

Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm." *Journal of communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.

D. Special session: take-home exam simulation (March 16th)

No reading for this week. One week before this class, I will publish two papers on Absalon, about which you will write the take-home exam simulation. You can choose a 72-hour period where you will write your answer, which is due the Friday before class (5 PM).

After that, I will release my own answers. I will ask you to read through these example answers and come to class with any questions you have. I will read through a sample of your submitted exam answers and address some common issues in class.

Part III: Experiments and causal inference

A. Methodology and survey experiments (March 23rd)

Experimental methodology

Druckman, James, Donald Green, James Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia. 2011. "Experiments: An Introduction to Core Concepts." In *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, edited by J. Druckman, P. Green, J. H. Kuklinksi, and A. Lupia, 15–26. New York: Oxford University Press.

Simmons, Joseph, Leif Nelson and Uri Simonsohn. "False-Positive Psychology: Undisclosed Flexibility in Data Collection and Analysis Allows Presenting Anything as Significant." *Psychological Science* 22 (2011): 1359-1366.

Survey experiments

Lyall, Jason, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai. "Explaining support for combatants during wartime: A survey experiment in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 4 (2013): 679-705.

Hainmueller, Jens, Dominik Hangartner, and Teppei Yamamoto. "Validating vignette and conjoint survey experiments against real-world behavior." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 8 (2015): 2395-2400.

B. Natural and field experiments (March 30th)

Natural experiments

Clingingsmith, David, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Michael Kremer. "Estimating the impact of the Hajj: religion and tolerance in Islam's global gathering." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124, no. 3 (2009): 1133-1170.

Kern, Holger Lutz, and Jens Hainmueller. "Opium for the masses: How foreign media can stabilize authoritarian regimes." *Political Analysis* 17, no. 4 (2009): 377-399. [skim sections 3.2.1-3.2.3, but read intro to section 3.2 carefully]

Field experiments

Gerber, Alan S., Dean Karlan, and Daniel Bergan. "Does the media matter? A field experiment measuring the effect of newspapers on voting behavior and political opinions." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, no. 2 (2009): 35-52.

Sands, Melissa L. "Exposure to inequality affects support for redistribution." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 663-668.

NOTE: no class Monday April 6th and 13th, Easter break.

Part IV: Consequences of public opinion

A. Representation and responsiveness (April 20th)

Classical approaches

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Vol. 4. Princeton University Press, 2017. Chapter 2.

James Stimson, Michael Mackuen, and Robert S Erikson. *Dynamic Representation*. *American Political Science Review*, 89(3):543–565, 1995. [skip section ‘The Dynamics of Institutional Response’]

New approaches

Lax, Jeffrey R., and Justin H. Phillips. "The democratic deficit in the states." *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 1 (2012): 148-166.

Butler, Daniel M. and David W. Nickerson. "Can learning constituency opinion affect how legislators vote? Results from a field experiment." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2011): 55–83.

B. Nonpolitical effects of public opinion (April 27th)

Interpersonal influence

Lazer, David, Brian Rubineau, Carol Chetkovich, Nancy Katz, and Michael Neblo. "The coevolution of networks and political attitudes." *Political Communication* 27, no. 3 (2010): 248-274.

Munger, Kevin. "Tweetment effects on the tweeted: Experimentally reducing racist harassment." *Political Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2017): 629-649.

Social, economic and media behavior

Iyengar, Shanto, and Masha Krupenkin. "Partisanship as Social Identity; Implications for the Study of Party Polarization." In *The Forum*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 23-45. De Gruyter, 2018.

Bolsen, Toby, and Thomas J. Leeper. "Self-interest and attention to news among issue publics." *Political Communication* 30, no. 3 (2013): 329-348.