Fall, 2006

Public Opinion (790-582)
Mondays 2:30 - 5:10, Hickman 313

Instructor: Professor Richard Lau (x2-9321)
Office Hours: Hickman 501, Tuesdays, 1:15 - 3:15, and by appointment

Class Description

This course attempts to survey the vast and sprawling literature devoted to public opinion (mostly American). It is based on the assumption that we have learned a lot in the last four decades. Granted the literature is complicated and ridden with debates; nonetheless, our understanding of public opinion is substantially deeper today than it was when V.O. Key was completing *Public Opinion and American Democracy* over 40 years ago. Isn't it?

Reading

Each week's reading assignment is detailed below. Much of the reading will be from journal articles. I will try to put one copy of each article in the mail room the week before it is to be read. Many of these articles are also available from JSTOR – and of course, you can find them all in Alexander Library.

In addition, the following books have been ordered by the Cook-Douglass bookstore and should be purchased for class. You may have several of these already, but you will want to have them all on your bookshelves ...


Requirements

The requirements for this class are simple:

1. Do the reading every week, and come to class prepared to discuss it.

2. Make one short presentations in class, where you will be responsible for doing some of the "optional" reading for a week, and reporting on it to the rest of us. We will coordinate these reports the second week of class.

The purpose of this practice (on which we will typically spend the second half of class every week) is to expose all of us to more of the literature than I am comfortable asking you to read every week. Thus I want whoever is responsible for the class presentation to prepare a brief (one-paragraph; or an outline) summary of every optional article/chapter you read, to be distributed to the other members of the class. But the focus of the presentation should be integrating this optional material with what we have all been reading and discussing in class.

3. Write a longer research paper on some topic related to public opinion.

In fact, the goal of this paper is to actually contribute to the public opinion literature, and thus to produce a paper of publishable quality (one that you would be happy to present at a convention, and eventually be willing to submit for publication). The paper can take the form of an extensive, integrating literature review, empirical analyses of extant public opinion data (the norm in this field), or some new data collection. (If you chose the last option, I will not expect your paper before the end of Spring semester – which is fine with me.] Your topic must be approved by me, and you should choose it by early October at the latest.

I will ask any of you "auditing" this class to do the short class presentations but not the larger paper (although feel free ...)

4. The last day of class is reserved for short presentations of student’s papers. We will pretend you are all on a panel at APSA, and everyone will have 15 minutes max to present their paper. Hopefully every student will have some feedback from everyone else in the class.

Grades will be based on:

   Class Participation ......................... 40%
   Short Class Presentation ............... 10%
   Larger Research Paper ................... 50%
Weekly Topics/Reading Assignments

I. Coming to Grips with the Holy Ghost

9/11  **Defining Public Opinion**  (Class Organization/Get Acquainted)


-------------------------------------------- Optional --------------------------------------------


9/18  Informational and Motivational Underpinnings


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II. Ideological Basis of Public Opinion

9/25  Ideological Innocence?


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**10/2  Ideological Constraint?**


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III. A Comprehensive Model of Public Opinion, and the Possibility of Deliberative Democracy

10/9 Deliberation and Zaller’s RAS Model


IV. Alternate Bases of Public Opinion

10/16 Values Underlying Public Opinion


---------------------------------- Optional ----------------------------------


Davis, Darren W., and Christian Davenport. 1999. “Assessing the Validity of the Post-materialism Index.” *American Political Science Review*, 93(September): 649-664. (See also reply by Inglehart and Abramson)


--------------------------- Optional ---------------------------


Mendelberg, Tali. 2008. “Racial Priming Revived.” Perspectives on Politics, 6(March): 109 - 124. [See also response by Huber and Lapinski, and rejoinder by Mendelberg.]


See comment by Lupia, Levine, Manning, and Sin, *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(December): 773 - 784, and response by Bartels immediately following ...


See the special issue of *Political Psychology*, March 1995 (Vol. 16, No. 1).


Norpoth, Helmut. 1996. "Presidents and the Prospective Voter." Journal of Politics, 58 (August):776-792. (See also response by MacKuen et al., and rejoinder by Norpoth, that follow.)


Mass Media, Framing, and Public Opinion


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See also the “Symposium: Media and Politics” in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 29, 10-36.
V. Public Opinion and Democracy

11/13 Presidential Popularity


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--------------------------- Optional ---------------------------


Key, V.O., Jr. (Op cit). (Chapters 16-21).


12/4  Collective Public Opinion

Page and Shapiro 1992. *The Rational Public.* [particularly chapters 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10]

Optional


12/11  CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Papers due today ...

45
**Information Processing Views of Ideology**

[Dropped in 2006, because most students had already had this material in Political Psychology ...]


-------------------------------------- Optional ----------------------------------


Metaphors and Public Opinion  DROP? Certainly drop Lakoff


-------------------------------- Optional --------------------------------


