

Public Opinion-POLS 321 - Fall 2008

Professor: Jason Gainous

Office Location: 406 Ford Hall

Class Meetings: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 AM-12:15 PM 305 Ford Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 PM-4:00 PM, and by appointment

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Course Home Page: <http://louisville.edu/~j0gain01/courses/POLS321/index.html>

Purpose of the Course

POLS 321 is an introduction to the nature and role of public opinion in American political life. The concept of public opinion exerts enormous influence on the political process in the United States. While most Americans agree in principle that public opinion should exercise major influence in a democracy, there are difficult questions about how to conceptualize and measure the phenomenon, the capacity of the citizenry to develop and apply reasoned opinions, and whether the emphasis on public opinion necessarily produces wise public policy. These are among the questions we will explore in the course. The major focus will be on determining the origin, nature and content of public opinion in the United States and how that opinion influences the conduct of politics.

Required Books

The following books have been ordered at area bookstores. You will also be required to read a number of articles that will be available on J-stor through the library homepage.

Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Seventh edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Books.

Bardes, Barbara A and Robert W. Oldendick. 2007. *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*. 3rd Edition. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, Inc.

Norrander, Barbara and Clyde Wilcox, editors. 2002. *Understanding Public Opinion*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Books.

Course Requirements

Your semester grade will be comprised of two short answer/essay examinations (a midterm and a final), a semester research paper, and participation. The two examinations will be based on the lectures and reading materials. The midterm is scheduled for Thursday, October 21 during the normal class hour, and the final is on Tuesday, December 16, 11:30AM - 2:00PM. Every student is expected to take the exams at the scheduled times and dates. The semester research paper will be described in an additional handout. The paper is due on the day of the final. **Attendance is not required but failure to attend will certainly decrease the probability of success in the course.**

Grade Distribution

Midterm	35%
Final	35%
Research Paper	20%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Schedule

This is my best guess about when we will cover specific topics. As a guess, it means that I am not bound to these dates and you will have to keep up with the readings based on our class progress. **All of the lecture slides are available on the course homepage.**

1. The Nature of Public Opinion (August 26-28)

- Bardes, ch. 1

2. Measuring Public Opinion (September 2-11)

- Bardes, ch. 2 and 4
- Asher, ch. 1-5

3. Interpreting Polling Data (September 16-18)

- Asher, ch. 8
- Norrander and Wilcox, pp. 343-355

4. Role of Public Opinion in Politics and Government (September 23-25)

- Bardes, ch. 3
- Asher, ch. 7
- Diane J. Heith. "Staffing the White House Public Opinion Apparatus." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 2. (1998).

5. Structure of Public Opinion (September 30-October 7)

- Norrander and Wilcox, ch. 8-9
- Bardes, ch. 6
- Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman. "How People Organize the Political World: A Schematic Model." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (1984).

6. Influences on Public Opinion: Socialization (October 9-16)

- Bardes, ch. 5

- M. Kent Jennings and Gregory B. Markus “Partisan Orientations over the Long Haul: Results from the Three-Wave Political Socialization Panel Study.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 4. (1984).

Midterm Examination on Tuesday October 21

7. Influences on Public Opinion: Group Factors (October 23-30)

- Norrander and Wilcox, chs. 1, 3, 4

8. Influences on Public Opinion: Mass Media (November 4-6)

- Asher, ch. 6
- Norrander and Wilcox, ch. 2

9. Content of Public Opinion (November 11-13)

- Norrander and Wilcox, chs. 5-6

10. Changes in Attitudes and Opinion (November 18-20)

- Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson. “Issue Evolution, Population Replacement, and Normal Partisan Change.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1. (1981).
- M. Kent Jennings. “Residues of a Movement: The Aging of the American Protest Generation.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2. (1987).

11. Public Policy and Public Opinion (November 25-27)

- Bardes, chs. 7-9
- Norrander and Wilcox, ch. 7

12. Public Opinion and Legislative Decisions (December 2-4)

- Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. “Constituency Influence in Congress.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (1963).
- Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro. “Effects of Public Opinion on Policy.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 77, No. 1. (1983).
- Norrander and Wilcox, chs. 10-11

13. Summary and the Future (December 9)

- Bardes, ch. 11-12

Final Examination on Tues., Dec. 16, 11:30AM - 2:00PM.