

Government and Politics 426
Public Opinion and Voting Behavior
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 to 12:15
Tydings Hall 2106
Spring 2008

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 to 3:00 (or by appointment)

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About the course

This course explores public opinion and voting behavior in contemporary American politics. It is concerned with three main areas: (1) the nature and development of public opinion; (2) political participation and voting behavior in American elections, and; (3) the influence of the media and other political elites on American public opinion. This course examines the theoretical development of public opinion and voting behavior research from the 1950s until present day. We will pay particular attention to the upcoming presidential election and to ongoing changes in the American party system.

Requirements

Class attendance is required and is particularly important in this course as lectures do not necessarily overlap with the readings; many key theoretical ideas are presented in class only. Weekly assignments should be read in advance of lecture so to best facilitate class discussion. Class requirements include a midterm and a final exam, two homework assignments (to be given out in class), and in-class participation. The exams will be comprised of short answer and short essay questions and will cover all readings and lectures. The final exam is not cumulative. If you are going to miss class due to illness or another excused absence, **you are required to email me in advance of the class** and bring documentation to support your excused absence on the day you return. If an assignment is due on the day you have an excused absence, please email it to me by 11:00 a.m. Power point charts and graphs will be made available on my website (link: course materials).

The final grade in the course will be determined on the following basis:

20% Homework/ Participation
35% Midterm Exam
45% Final Exam

The required books for this course are:

- Karen M. Kaufmann, John R. Petrocik and Daron R. Shaw. *Unconventional Wisdom*
- Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy*
- Morris P. Fiorina. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*
- Thomas E. Patterson. *The Vanishing Voter*
- *Course Pack for GVPT 426* (Available at the College Copy Center – 7319 Baltimore Ave #B. Located next to R.J. Bentley's (301-985-5100) – go downstairs – Hours: 11:00 am to 5:00 pm – **CASH ONLY.**)
- **JSTOR** Articles can be accessed on any UMD network computer via links on my website syllabus, or via the research port link on the UMD library website - <http://www.lib.umd.edu>

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1

September 2: NO CLASS (Professor Kaufmann will be out of town)

September 4: Introduction/ Measuring Public Opinion

WEEK 2

September 9: Measuring Public Opinion

September 11: Public Opinion and Political Ideology

Assigned Reading:

Course Pack:

Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 2 (pp. 24-57)

WEEK 3

September 16: Public Opinion and Ideology (cont'd)

- Homework Assignment #1 will be given out in class. You will have to sign up for a topic, so don't miss class! It will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday, September 25th.

September 18: Elites and Public Opinion

Assigned Reading:

Course Pack:

Zaller: *A Model of Communication Effects at the Outbreak of the Gulf War* (pp. 296-311)

Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 3 (pp. 53-83)

WEEK 4

September 23: Elites and Public Opinion

September 25: What Americans Believe

- Hard copy of paper and chart(s) due at the beginning of class. PLEASE DO NOT EMAIL YOUR PAPER TO ME UNLESS YOU HAVE AN EXCUSED ABSENCE. Email your **chart(s) ONLY** to me by 9:00 a.m. (at the latest) with your name and topic in the subject line. Be prepared to briefly discuss your findings (2-3 minutes tops) during class.

Assigned Reading:

Course Pack:

Erikson and Tedin: Chapter 4 (pp.92-114)

WEEK 5

September 30: NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

October 2: What Americans Believe cont'd.

Assigned Reading:

None

WEEK 6

October 7: Democratic Values and Public Opinion

October 9: NO CLASS (YOM KIPPUR)

Assigned Reading:

JSTOR:

(1) John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George Marcus. 1979. An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance: Ilusory Increases 1950s-1970s, *American Political Science Review*, Volume 73:3:781-794

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1955404>

(2) Darren W. Davis and Brian D. Silver. 2004. Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of Terrorist Attacks on America, *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 48:1:28-46
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519895>

WEEK 7

October 14: Group Differences in Public Opinion
October 16: **MIDTERM**

Assigned Reading:

JSTOR:

Donald R. Kinder, & Nicholas Winter. 2001. Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy, *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 45:2: 439-453
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2669351>

WEEK 8:

October 21: Parties and Party Identification
October 23: Parties and Party Identification

Assigned Reading:

Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw: Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 (pp.3-45).
Course Pack:
Lewis-Beck et al., Chapter 7 (pp.138-160)

WEEK 9

October 28: Culture Wars and Party Realignment
October 30: Culture Wars and Party Realignment

Assigned Reading:

Fiorina: Chapters 1 through 4 (pp.1-77), Chapter 7 (127-143), and Chapter 10 (187-228)
Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw: Chapter 3 (47-65).

WEEK 10

November 4th: Participation and Turnout (**DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!!!**)
November 6th: Post-election Roundup

Assigned Reading:

Rosenstone and Hansen: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (pp. 1-70); 5, 6, and 7 (pp.128-227).

WEEK 11

November 11: Participation and Turnout
November 13: Models of Voting Behavior

Assigned Reading:

Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw: Chapters 6 and 7 (pp.115-161).

WEEK 12

November 18: Voting cont'd
November 20: Mass Media and Public Opinion

Assigned Reading:

Clawson and Oxley: Chapter 3 (pp.55-92)

WEEK 13

November 25: Mass Media and Campaign Politics

- Homework Assignment #2 will be given out in class. It will be due at the beginning of class on December 4.

November 27: NO CLASS (Happy Turkey Day!)

Assigned Reading:

Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw: Chapters 4 and 5 (pp.67 to 113).

JSTOR:

Gilens, Martin. 1996. Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media, *Public Opinion Quarterly* Volume 60:515-541.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2749633>

WEEK 14

December 2: Mass Media and Campaign Politics

December 4: Campaign Strategies -- Homework #2 due at the beginning of class

Assigned Reading:

Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw: Chapter 8 (pp.163-190).

WEEK 15

December 9: Mass Media and Democracy cont'd

December 11: Mass Media and Democracy

Assigned Reading:

Patterson: Chapters 1 through 5 (pp.1-145)

FINAL EXAM: Monday, December 15th, 8:00 TO 10:00 A.M.