

Course requirements and grading

Five separate components of this course contribute to your grade:

- Two short essays (each worth 20 percent of your grade). These papers, between 4 to 6 pages in length, will require you to briefly analyze a question regarding public opinion. Assignments with details about these papers will be handed out in class. These papers are due at the beginning of class on March 5 and April 25.
- A midterm examination (20 percent). This in-class written exam will cover all material presented in class through March 14. It will include questions in short-answer and brief-essay format. This exam will be held on March 26.
- A final examination (30 percent). This two-hour written exam will cover material from the entire semester, with a focus on material presented after the midterm exam. According to the Registrar's office, this exam is currently scheduled to be held in our classroom on Tuesday, May 21 at 2 p.m.
- Class attendance and participation (10 percent):

Attending class is good for you. The lectures will present material not covered in the readings, synthesize ideas and concepts, and—I promise—be interesting. To stress the importance of attendance, I will call roll for a randomly selected group of students at the beginning of every class session. You are permitted two (2) unexcused absences (out of a total of 27 class sessions) for the semester, no questions asked. Any more than two absences will result in a reduction of your class participation grade, with additional reductions taken for additional absences. If you seek to be excused from attendance, please let me know via email beforehand. Do not assume you have been excused until you hear a response from me.

To the extent possible in a large class, we will periodically discuss the material we are studying. Please participate in these discussions to the best extent that you can. It will make discussion more interesting and engaging for you and for the rest of the class. I understand that some students find it difficult to present their ideas to a group and contribute to discussion. However, speaking in public is a critical life skill which your college education should help you acquire. I will therefore occasionally call on students who are not voluntarily participating to contribute to class discussion. If you are someone who has particular trouble participating in class, please see me during office hours so I get a sense of what you're thinking and how you're handling the material.

The fine print

Here are a few policies that I sincerely hope won't be necessary or relevant to our work together this semester:

Missing exams. Students missing an exam will receive a grade of zero. If a true emergency situation arises, contact me before the scheduled test time. If I determine that the excuse is justified (such as in cases of illness or family/personal emergencies), we will schedule a make-up. Travel plans (e.g., a plane ticket purchased for departure before the day of the exam) are not an acceptable excuse.

Late papers. Papers must be turned in on time by the beginning of class on the day they are due. You will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from an A- to a B+) per day late.

Academic dishonesty. The work you do in this course must be your own work. Academic dishonesty is not only against the rules; it is also slothful, cowardly, unfair to your classmates, and a waste of the tuition money you and your family have worked hard to earn. I simply won't tolerate it. The University's penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and can include receipt of a failing grade in the course for which plagiarized work was submitted; probation, suspension, or expulsion; and the entry of a letter describing the incident in a file kept permanently by the Office of the Dean. For more details, see: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>.

Readings (with syllabus abbreviations)

Books for purchase at the NYU Main Bookstore:

- (APO) Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. 2011. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact*. New York: Pearson Education. Updated 8th edition.
**Our primary text. *Make sure you read this (8th) edition*, which is updated with the latest polling and election results.
- (WAK) Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- (TRP) Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (EPA) Pollock III, Philip H. 2011. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. Washington: CQ Press. 4th edition. You may also buy the 3rd edition, as the reading assignments are the same.
- (TOC) Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Additional readings are available on the "NYU Classes" site—they are marked with an (N) on this syllabus—or in a reader (R) that may be purchased at New University Copy, 27 Waverly Place. It will be available for purchase by January 30.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

How to think about the readings: Be sure to read the readings *before* class on the day they are assigned; you will often be asked to discuss them in class. The readings for this class average about 70 pages per class session, and very few of them are technical. Depending on how fast a reader you are, consider budgeting between two to three hours per class session to keep on top of the readings. When several readings are assigned for one class session, you will find it helpful to read the assigned selection from the textbook (APO) first.

PART I. Public Opinion and Polling

Tues. Jan. 29 Overview: what is public opinion, and why does it matter?

Thurs. Jan. 31 The APO poll. Polling and democracy.

- Herbert Blumer (1948), "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling." *American Sociological Review* 13: 542-549. (N)
- Benjamin Ginsberg (1986), *The Captive Public*. Ch. 3. (N)
- Sidney Verba (1996) "The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 90: 1-7. (N)

Tues. Feb. 5 Theories of public opinion. The history of polling.

- APO, Ch. 1.
- Susan Herbst (1993), *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. Ch. 3. (N)

Thurs. Feb. 7 How polling is done today. The use (and misuse) of polls.

- APO, Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4.
- Ann E. Marimow, "Last Minute Push Polls Send Some Voters Over the Edge." *Washington Post*, November 3, 2006. (N)
- Jon Cohen. "When a Poll Is Not Really A Poll." *Washington Post*, August 8, 2007. (N)

Plus, skim/surf:

- "Recent SFGate Polls." online at <http://www.sfgate.com/polls>
- American National Election Studies (2008). Pre-election questionnaire and Pre-Election Respondent Booklet. (N)

Tues. Feb. 12 Key concepts and terms for understanding polling.

- EPA, Chapter 2.

Thurs. Feb. 14 Polling pitfalls.

- APO, Section 2.3.
- Patrick J. Egan, Nathaniel Persily and Kevin Wallsten (2008). "Gay Rights." in *Public Opinion and Constitutional Controversy*. pp. 234-245. (N)
- Roger Tourangeau and Tom W. Smith. (1996). "Asking Sensitive Questions: The Impact of Data Collection Mode, Question Format, and Question Context." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 60:275-304. (N)
- Brad Lockerbie and Stephen A. Borrelli (1990). "Question Wording and Public Support for Contra Aid, 1983-1986." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 54: 195-208. (N)

PART II. What People Know and Think About Politics

Tues. Feb. 19 Political information (and lack thereof).

- WAK, Introduction and Ch. 2.
- Egan, Patrick J. and Megan Mullin (2012). "Turning Personal Experience into Political Attitudes: The Effect of Local Weather on Americans' Perceptions about Global Warming." *Journal of Politics* 74: 796-809.

Thurs. Feb. 21 Response instability and a theory of survey response.

- APO, Ch. 3.
- John Zaller and Stanley Feldman (1992). "A Simple Theory of Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36: 579-616. (N)

Tues. Feb. 26 The consequences of political knowledge.

- WAK, Ch. 6 and 7.
- Arthur Lupia. (1994) "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California's Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88:63-76. (N)

Thurs. Feb. 28 **Class canceled today.**

Tues. March 5

Analyzing survey data: basic tools.

First short essay due at beginning of class.

- ❑ EPA, Chapter 3: "Making Comparisons."
EPA, Chapter 4: "Observational Studies" and "Three Scenarios."
EPA, Chapter 5: entire.

Thurs. March 7

The role of self-interest.

- ❑ David O. Sears and Carolyn L. Funk (1990). "Self-Interest in Americans' Political Opinions." in *Beyond Self Interest*, edited by Jane J. Mansbridge. (R)
- ❑ Larry M. Bartels. (2005) "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 15-31. (N)

Tues. March 12

Socialization as citizens and partisans.

- ❑ APO, Ch. 5.
- ❑ Richard G. Niemi and M. Kent Jennings (1991). "Issues and Inheritance in the Formation of Party Identification." *American Journal of Political Science* 35:970-988. (N)
- ❑ M. Kent Jennings, Laura Stoker and Jake Bowers (2009). "Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71: 782-799. (N)
- ❑ Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler (2002). *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. pp. 75-82. (R)

Thurs. March 14

Catch up, review for midterm exam.

SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS MARCH 19 OR MARCH 21.

Tues. March 26

Midterm examination.

PART III. From Opinions to a Public

Thurs. March 28 The miracle of aggregation.

- TRP, Ch. 1 – 2

Tues. April 2 The nation's attitudes: trends over time.

- APO, Ch. 4
- TOC, Ch. 2
- Pew Research Center (2012) "Trends in American Values: 1987-2012." Read Summary of Findings and Sections 3 through 8; skim rest if interested. (N)

Thurs. April 4 The nation's attitudes: what's changed and why.

- TOC, Ch. 3
- TRP, Ch. 8

Tues. April 9 The nation's attitudes: the role of the media.

- APO, Ch. 8
- Markus Prior (2007) *Post-Broadcast Democracy*. Ch. 4 (R)
- TRP, Ch. 9

Thurs. April 11 Media effects: agenda-setting and priming.

- Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder (1987) *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chs. 2, 3 and 7. (R)

PART IV. Campaigns, Elections and Exit Polls

Tues. April 16 Campaigns.

- TOC, Ch. 4
- Elisabeth Bumiller (2004). "Turnout Effort and Kerry, Too, Were G.O.P.'s Keys to Victory," *New York Times*, November 3. (N)
- Adam Nagourney et al (2012) "How a Race in the Balance Went to Obama." *New York Times*, November 7. (N)

Thurs. April 18 More tools: scatterplots, correlation and regression lines.

- EPA, Chapter 8. Entire.

Tues. April 23 Elections: aggregate results.

- Fair, Ray C. (2012) *Predicting Presidential Elections and Other Things*. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (R)
- Read Ray Fair's prediction for the 2008 presidential and Congressional elections at <http://fairmodel.econ.yale.edu/vote2008/index2.htm>

Thurs. April 25 Elections: individual choices and exit polls.
Second short essay due at beginning of class.

- APO, Ch. 9. Also quickly re-read "Election Day Exit Polls" in Section 2.4.
- Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde (2011). *Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections*. Ch. 8 (R)
- National Election Pool Election Day Questionnaire, 2008. (N)
- 2012 national exit poll results, at <http://elections.nbcnews.com/ns/politics/2012/all/president/#exitPoll>
- "Exit polls 2012: How the vote has shifted," *Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/2012-exit-polls/>

Part V. Public Opinion and Democratic Responsiveness

Tues. April 30 Do our elected officials listen to us?

- APO, Ch. 10 and Section 11-1.

Thurs. May 2 Do we listen to our elected officials?

- George C. Edwards III (2003). *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. Preface and Chapters 1-3. (R)
- Pew Research Center (2012) "Two-Thirds of Democrats Now Support Gay Marriage; Obama Endorsement Has Limited Impact." July 31 (N)

Tues. May 7 Catching up; review for the final exam.

Thurs. May 9 Grand finale: Can the people govern? Do they?

- Edmund Burke, "Speech to the Electors of Bristol." (N)
- APO, Sections 11-2 and 11-3.
- TRP, Ch. 10.
- (Reread) WAK, Ch. 7.

Tues. May 21

Final examination, 2 p.m.