

Political Science 4120: Public Opinion and Participation

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Office hours:
On campus W 12:00-1:30
On line Tues 10:00-11:30
and by appointment

For democratic rule to succeed, people must be able to translate their public policy preferences into public policy. The goal of this course is to understand how public opinion and political participation can influence public policy. This course will achieve this goal in several steps. First, students will examine the way in which public opinion is revealed through public opinion polls. Understanding public opinion requires that individuals understand what goes into a poll so that they may better evaluate what a poll reveals about public opinion. Second, we need to understand how public opinion is formed as well as the substance of public opinion in the United States—what factors influence people’s opinions and how this provides leaders with information about the policies the public really wants implemented. We next need to understand how people try to get the government to adopt their preferences through available means of political participation. Finally, we examine the extent to which political leaders are responsive to public opinion and political participation.

In this course, students are responsible for keeping up with all reading on the syllabus. Students will write 2 short (5-page) papers. Each paper is worth 20% of the final grade. There is also a mid-term exam that is worth 25%. Finally, there will be a comprehensive final examination at the conclusion of the course that is worth 35% of the final grade. ALSO NOTE, THERE WILL BE NO MAKEUP EXAMS OR INCOMPLETES GRANTED WITHOUT AN EXCUSE FROM YOUR DEAN.

The following book is required for the course:

1. Clawson, Rosalee and Zoe Oxley. 2020. *Public Opinion; Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. CQ Press. 4th ed. ISBN 978-1544390208. To purchase an electronic copy: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/public-opinion/book244708>

Learning Objectives

1. This class will emphasize development of analytic and evaluative skills through readings from journal articles and other supplementary materials. Toward this end, students should complete readings to gain an understanding of public opinion and participation for critically evaluating how well the public can influence the government.
2. This class will promote independent thinking by making students accountable for important aspects of their learning. Toward this end, students are expected to complete assigned reading and come to class with some background to allow for discussion of how the readings help us understand current politics.
3. This class will place material in a conceptual context that illustrates its importance and relationship to other knowledge. Toward this end, students are expected to connect mass political activity to similar processes motivating non-political thought and activity.

Course Requirements

Students are responsible for all of the material in the readings and discussed in lectures. In addition to the textbook and on-line journal articles, materials may be posted to Campus as circumstances arise. Grades for the course will be based upon a midterm (25%), final (35%), and two short papers (20% each).

Papers and Exams

Students are required to submit their papers to Turnitin, a web-based plagiarism detection service through the class Campus site. Before submitting your paper to Turnitin, please remove your title page and other personal information. On both papers, you need to cite readings from the class to support your arguments. **Papers that do not refer to the readings will not receive any credit.**

Questions on the exams will be drawn from both the readings and the lectures. Makeup exams will be given only for **documented** absences and, with the exception of extended medical problems or family emergencies, exams must be made up by the next class period. Any other conflicts with exam times must be raised at least **3 days** in advance of the exam.

Extra Credit and Grades

You should *not* expect extra credit. If I do offer extra credit, it is only when I can make it available to everyone in the class and when it furthers some educational goal that complements the goals of the course curriculum. I will not offer it as a “do-over” to students who have not completed their work satisfactorily. If you need a particular grade to graduate, maintain a particular GPA, etc. make sure you are putting in the effort to get that grade. If your grade for the midterm exam does not meet your needs, be sure to seek help before the final exam. If you wait until after that exam, you may already be in too deep of a hole.

Grades will be posted on Canvas in a timely fashion. In the event of discrepancies with those grade records, discrepancies must be resolved within two weeks of their posting. So be sure to check on your assignments and tests in a timely manner. If I do not have a record of your taking an exam or doing an assignment and you cannot produce the evidence that you did the work, your grade on that exam or assignment will be 0. Again, it is your responsibility to confirm that files are uploaded correctly to Canvas. Finally, keeping apprised of your standing with respect to your grades is your responsibility. Use the percentages above to calculate a rough estimate of your current grade. The TA and I will not calculate your overall grade during the semester.

Academic Integrity Policy

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Students should review the policy, which may be located at <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>. Faculty are required to submit reports of violations of academic dishonesty even in instances that do not result in sanctions. There will be no deviation from this policy.

Classroom Policies

With respect to classroom policies, I assume that you are adults who are either capable of making your own decisions regarding your best interests or at the time when you need to start learning how to make such decisions. I also assume that most, if not all, of you are in college to prepare yourself in some way for professional life beyond college. As such, you should ask yourself whether your actions in this class are preparing you to conduct yourself successfully in that life.

- COVID-19 Impact on Attendance

Given the pandemic, in-person attendance is not required. If you do not attend lecture in person, I do encourage you to take advantage of remote access. All lectures will be recorded on Panopto and available through Canvas. Additionally, I will try to have Zoom sessions to allow students to participate live remotely. If you do attend, please do so only on the day that you are registered for in order to allow us to maintain social distance within the classroom.

Likewise, if you do attend, you are required to wear a mask—**NO EXCEPTIONS**. Face coverings are required in all UNT facilities. Students are expected to wear face coverings during this class. Since you have the option of receiving all content remotely, in-person attendance means that you agree to adhere to the mask requirement. Disposable masks are available for students at a number of locations on campus. Please refer to <https://vpaa.unt.edu/return> for a list of locations. If you are unable to wear a face covering due to a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Access to request an accommodation. UNT face covering requirements are subject to change due to community health guidelines. Any changes will be communicated via the instructor.

It is important for all of us to be mindful of the health and safety of everyone in our community, especially given concerns about COVID-19. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure. While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

- Class Recordings & Student Likenesses

Synchronous (live) sessions in this course will be recorded for students enrolled in this class section to refer to throughout the semester. Class recordings are the intellectual property of the university or instructor and are reserved for use only by students in this class and only for educational purposes. Students may not post or otherwise share the recordings outside the class, or outside the Canvas Learning Management System, in any form. Failing to follow this restriction is a violation of the UNT Code of Student Conduct and could lead to disciplinary action.

- Class Materials for Remote Instruction

Students will need access to a microphone to participate in fully remote portions of the class; although, without a microphone you can still listen to the lecture and post questions through the Chat feature in Zoom. Information on how to be successful in a remote learning environment can be found at <https://online.unt.edu/learn>.

Disabilities Accommodation

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early

as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://disability.unt.edu>.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify you with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

1 Introduction (Jan. 11)

These lectures discuss the role of public opinion and political participation in the American political system and provides an overview of how opinion and participation influence policy.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 1.

2 Studying Public Opinion

2.1 Lies, Damned Lies, and Surveys: The Effects of Question Wording, Ordering, and Other Interview Effects (Jan. 13-20)

These lectures will explore how it is possible to measure attitudes and the potential problems that arise when trying to measure something that is fundamentally unobservable.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 1 appendix.
2. Zaller and Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences" *American Journal of Political Science*. 36(3):579-616.
3. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus. 1978. "Ideological Constraint in the Mass Public: A Methodological Critique and Some New Findings" *American Journal of Political Science*. 22(2):233-49.
4. Bishop and Oldendick. 1978. "Change in the Structure of American Political Attitudes: The Nagging Question of Question Wording" *American Journal of Political Science*. 22(2):250-69.

5. Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber. 1982. "Political Information Processing: Question Order and Context Effects" *Political Behavior*. 4(2):177-200.

⇒ No class for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday (Jan. 18)

2.2 An Introduction to Sampling: Why $1067 \approx 300$ Million (Jan. 25-27)

Most examinations of public opinion involve interviewing a large sample of people to evaluate the attitudes of a population. This lecture provides a basic understanding of how it is possible for a relatively small sample of people can provide information about the attitudes and behavior of a large nation. The lecture will also list some challenges to effective sampling.

1. Kalton. *Introduction to Survey Sampling*. pp. 82-4. (Canvas)
2. Groves. 2011. "Three Eras of Survey Research" *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 75(5), 861-871.
3. Kennedy, McGeeney, Keeter, Patten, Perrin, Lee, and Best. 2018. "Implications of Moving Public Opinion Surveys to a Single-Frame Cell-Phone Random-Digit-Dial Design" *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 82(2):279-299.
4. Cavari and Freedman. 2018. "Polarized Mass or Polarized Few? Assessing the Parallel Rise of Survey Nonresponse and Measures of Polarization." *Journal of Politics*. 80(2):719-725.
5. Bort. 2020. "What Pollsters Want You to Know About What Went Wrong." *Rolling Stone*.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/polling-failure-2020-election-1091176/>

3 Influences on Public Opinion

3.1 Personal Experience & Environment (Feb. 1-3)

It is reasonable that people's attitudes will be shaped by their experiences. But it is not quite so clear which experiences are the most important. These lectures will assess which situations from people's lives influence their attitudes and beliefs.

1. Clawson and Oxley Ch. 2 & 6.
2. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined" *Journal of Politics*. 71(3):782-799.
3. Mondak and Halperin. 2008. "A Framework for the Study of Personality and Political Behaviour." *British Journal of Political Science*. 38(2):335-362.
4. Chong, Citrin, and Conley. 2001. "When Self-Interest Matters" *Political Psychology*. 22(3):541-570.
5. Noelle-Neumann *The Spiral of Silence* Ch. 3 (Canvas).

3.2 Information, Sophistication, and Cognition (Feb. 8-10)

An important finding from psychology for the study of public opinion is that people's approach to politics varies by their interest and ability to process information about politics, and that these differences influence how they form attitudes. These lectures will consider how differences in people's level of political information influences their subsequent political beliefs.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 4 & 8
2. Delli Carpini and Keeter. 1991. "Stability and Change in the U.S. Public's Knowledge of Politics" *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 55(4):583-612.
3. Converse. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" in *Ideology and Discontent*, 206-61. (Canvas)
4. Zaller. 1991. "Information, Values, and Opinion" *American Political Science Review*. 85(4):1215-1237.
5. Nyhan and Reifler. 2010. "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions" *Political Behavior*, 32(2):303-330.
6. Berinsky. 2015. "Rumors and Health Care Reform: Experiments in Political Misinformation." *British Journal of Political Science*. 47:241-262.

3.3 Emotion (Feb. 15-17)

A second area where psychology has influenced how we understand public opinion concerns emotions. While often derided as "irrational," emotions have predictable, and very reasonable, influences upon how people think about political issues. These lectures examine the relationship between particular emotions and public opinion.

1. Marcus and MacKuen. 1993. "Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and Involvement during Presidential Campaigns." *American Political Science Review*. 87(3):672-85.
2. Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese. 2007. "On the Distinct Political Effects of Anxiety and Anger" (Canvas).
3. Brader, Valentino, and Suhay. 2008. "What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat" *American Journal of Political Science*. 52(4):959-978.
4. Petersen, Synycer, Cosmides, and Tooby. 2012. "Who Deserves Help? Evolutionary Psychology, Social Emotions, and Public Opinion about Welfare" *Political Psychology*. 33(3):395-418.

3.4 The Mass Media (Feb. 22-24)

The mass media is how most people receive information about politics. Accordingly, it stands to reason that the news media can influence public opinion. While much of the popular treatment of the media's influence upon public opinion focuses upon one type of bias or another, there is clear evidence that the media can influence public opinion in ways that have nothing to do with ideology or partisanship. These lectures examine how the news media influence public opinion.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 3.
2. Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs" *The American Political Science Review*. 76(4):848-858.
3. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance" *American Political Science Review*. 91(3):567-84.
4. Gilliam and Iyengar. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public" *American Journal of Political Science*. 44(3):560-73.
5. Levendusky and Malhotra. 2016. "Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?" *Political Communication*, 33(2) 283-301.
6. Baum and Potter. 2019. "Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy in the Age of Social Media." *Journal of Politics*. 81(2):747-756.

***Paper #1 due Feb. 24

4 Expressions of Public Opinion

4.1 Party Identification and Ideology (Mar. 1-3)

Ideology and Party Identification are two fundamental concepts that both reflect people's orientation to the political world and shape their attitudes on specific public policies. These lectures describe the American public's ideological and partisan profile and draw implications for public policy.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 5
2. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. Ch. 6 (Canvas).
3. Carsey and Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate" *American Journal of Political Science*. 50(2):464-477.
4. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope. *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized Public*, 3rd ed. Ch. 3-4. (Canvas)

5. Abramowitz and Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *The Journal of Politics*. 70(2):542-555.
6. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and misreadings" *The Journal of Politics*. 70(2):556-560.
7. Abramowitz and Webster. 2016. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of US elections in the 21st Century" *Electoral Studies*. 41(1):12-22.

Mid-term exam (Mar. 8)

4.2 Democratic Values and Tolerance (Mar. 10-15)

People's political attitudes are shaped not only by their ideologies and partisanship, but also by their attachment to core political values, such as individualism, equality, and humanitarianism. While these values correlate to some extent with ideology and partisanship, they provide a competing orientation to the political world that can independently shape political attitudes and even influence ideological and partisan beliefs. These lectures look more closely at values that provide a foundation that can help anchor Americans' public policy attitudes.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 9.
2. Feldman. 1988. "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values" *American Journal of Political Science*. 32(2):416-440.
3. Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Stevens. 2005. "The Emotional Foundation of Political Cognition: The Impact of Extrinsic Anxiety on the Formation of Political Tolerance Judgments" *Political Psychology*. 26(6):949-963.
4. Cizmar, Layman, McTague, Pearson-Merkowitz, and Spivey. 2014. "Authoritarianism and American Political Behavior from 1952 to 2008" *Political Research Quarterly*. 67(1):71-83.

4.3 Political Trust and System Support (Mar. 17-22)

The 2016 elections highlighted concerns that have been building for decades about the degree to which citizens trust the government and the ramifications of such attitudes. The Framers thought that some distrust of government was healthy, in that vigilance over government activity would prevent the government from becoming too powerful. At the same time, complete distrust of government can make it impossible for the government to fulfill many of its most basic functions. These lectures will examine the factors that influence the public's level of trust in government.

1. Clawson and Oxley Ch. 11.
2. Miller. "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970" 1974. *American Political Science Review*. 68(3):951-972.
3. Citrin. 1974. "Comment: The Political Relevance of Trust in Government" *American Political Science Review*. 68(3):973-988.

4. Hetherington. 1998. "The Political Relevance of Political Trust" *American Political Science Review*. 92(4):791-808.
5. Rudolph and Evans. 2005. "Political Trust, Ideology, and Public Support for Government Spending" *American Journal of Political Science*. 49(3):660-671.
6. Oliver and Wood. 2014. "Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science*. 58(4):952-966.

4.4 Racial Attitudes (Mar. 24-29)

Gunnar Myrdal described race as the "American dilemma." By this, Myrdal believed that racial relations in the United States posed a challenge to Americans' beliefs in individualism and equal treatment. Race is clearly a politically relevant aspect of American politics, with clear divergence between whites' and African Americans' beliefs and political behavior. These lectures examine the nature of racial attitudes in the United States and some of the consequences of these attitudes for both racial and ostensibly non-racial policies.

1. Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 7.
2. Devine. 1989. "Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 56(1):5-18.
3. Moberg, Krysan, and Christianson. 2019. "The Polls—Trends: Racial Attitudes in America." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 83(2):450-471.
4. Kinder and Sears. 1981. "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism Versus Racial Threats to the Good Life" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 40(3):414-31.
5. Bobo. 1983. "Whites' opposition to busing: Symbolic racism or realistic group conflict?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 45(6):1196-1210.
6. Sniderman, et al. 1991. "The New Racism" *American Journal of Political Science*. 35(2):423-447.
7. Gilens. 1996. "'Race Coding' and White Opposition to Welfare." *American Political Science Review*. 593-604.
8. Federico. 2006. "Race, Education, and Individualism Revisited." *Journal of Politics*. 68(3):600-610.

5 Political Participation

5.1 Traditional Assessments of Participation (Mar. 31-Apr. 5)

When people think about political participation, they tend to think for the form of political activity in which most people engage: voting. But voting is certainly not the only form of participation.

Most importantly, for any individual person, it is likely to be the least effective means of influencing public policy. These lectures examine the various forms of participation, their ability to influence political leaders' decisions, and some standard explanations for why people participate.

1. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality*, Ch. 2-3. (Canvas)
2. Leighley. 1995. "Attitudes, Opportunities, and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation" *Political Research Quarterly*. 48(1):181-209.

5.2 The Rationality of Participation (Apr. 7)

Participation in a democracy is often viewed as an instrumental means for the public to influence political leaders. If people want to influence the government, then participation is seen as a rational means of achieving that end. But is it really rational for people to participate in politics? This lecture examines whether individuals can really expect to influence government by participating politically.

1. Aldrich. 1993. "Rational Choice and Turnout" *American Journal of Political Science*. 37(1):246-290.

5.3 Political and Legal Factors Influencing Voting (Apr. 12-14)

Voting is the most common form of political participation. Yet, turnout varies by both time and space. These lectures explore the differences in political and legal circumstances that can have the effect of increasing or depressing turnout.

1. Powell. 1986. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective" *The American Political Science Review* 80(1):17-43.
2. Highton. 1997. "Easy Registration and Voter Turnout" *Journal of Politics*. 59(2):565-575.
3. Gronke and Miller. 2012. "Voting by Mail and Turnout in Oregon: Revisiting Southwell and Burchett" *American Politics Research*. 40(6):976-997.
4. Burden, Canon, Mayer, and Moynihan. 2014.. "Election Laws, Mobilization, and Turnout: The Unanticipated Consequences of Election Reform" *American Journal of Political Science*. 58(1):95-109.
5. Burden. 2018. "Disagreement over ID Requirements and Minority Voter Turnout" *The Journal of Politics*. 80(3):
6. Cox and Munger. 1989. "Closeness, Expenditures, and Turnout in the 1982 U.S. House Elections" *American Political Science Review* 83(1):217-232
7. Gerber and Green. 2000. "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment" *American Political Science Review*. 94(3):653-663.

5.4 Social Networks and Participation (Apr. 19)

Isolated individuals may not be able to have much influence by participating politically, but since we live in society, we may need to consider how our social context influences our willingness to participate—and how context can lead to mass mobilization that can create conditions for people to influence political leaders. These lectures examine the influence of groups upon political participation.

1. Putnam. 1995. “Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital.” *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1):65-78.
2. McClurg. 2003. “Social networks and political participation: The role of social interaction in explaining political participation.” *Political research quarterly*, 56(4):449-464.
3. Bond, Fariss, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settle, & Fowler. 2012. “A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization.” *Nature*, 489(7415):295-298.

6 Representation

6.1 Responsiveness to Public Input (Apr. 21)

Being able to express political opinions or participate politically are ultimately directed at influencing the government. These lectures examines how responsive political leaders are to the mass public.

1. Clawson and Oxley Ch. 12.
2. Shapiro. 2011. “Public Opinion and American Democracy.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 75(5):982-1017.
3. Gilens and Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics*. 12(3):564-581.
4. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality*, Ch. 16. (Canvas)

***Paper #2 due Apr. 21

Final exam

Apr. 26 1:30-3:30 (Check Registrar’s Web Site for Date and Time <http://registrar.unt.edu/exams/final-exam-schedule/spring> for confirmation.)