

Political Opinion in the U.S. (Govt 496/696)

FALL 2017

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Suhay, PhD

Time and Location: Mon 5:30-8:00, Kerwin 6

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Office Hours: Mon 12-2 & by appointment, Kerwin 217

Course Description

In a democracy, those who govern are—in theory, at least—beholden to the public’s wishes. What does the public want, and why? In this course, students will read works on U.S. political opinion by leading scholars in the field of Political Science. The course will cover debates over voter competence; the causes and effects of partisan identification; the depth and organization of political ideology; key influences on political opinion, including self-interest, values, and social group identification; various aspects of polarization; salient, contemporary inter-group resentments; and attitudes surrounding the topic of economic inequality. It is recommended that students be familiar with basic statistical analysis (especially regression analysis) prior to taking this course.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

1. Characterize the political opinions of the American public
2. Enumerate the factors thought to shape political opinion
3. Evaluate the quality and coherence of U.S. political opinion
4. Understand and distinguish multiple methods for studying public opinion
5. Demonstrate the ability to analyze original public opinion data
6. Create, and defend with scholarly research, an original argument about U.S. political opinion

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of University policy and may result in a failing grade in the course and/or other disciplinary measures. It is important that you familiarize yourself with AU's Academic Integrity Code, located here:

<https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>

Policies for a Digital Age

No computers or cell phones unless instructed. (Some exceptions permitted for individuals on a case-by-case basis—please see instructor.) No recording of lectures or discussions without permission.

Required Texts (available at campus bookstore website and on reserve at library)

- Donald R. Kinder & Nathan P. Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. University of Chicago Press. \$26
- Samara Klar & Yanna Krupnikov. 2016. *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*. Cambridge University Press. \$29
- Marissa Abrajano & Zoltan L. Hajnal. 2015. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*. Princeton University Press. \$20
- Katherine J. Cramer. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press. \$24
- Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age, Second Edition*. Russell Sage Foundation & Princeton University Press. \$23

Course Expectations and Assignments

Essays — 40% of grade

Students will complete three 1250-1500-word essays (approximately 4-5 pages). The first is worth 10%; the second and third are worth 15% each. Students must complete one paper during each course unit. Papers must be argument driven and include formal citations to the literature. (Outside reading not required.)

Final paper — 30% of grade

Students will write a 3500-4500-word research paper (approximately 12-15 pages) that incorporates course readings and also draws from scholarly research on public opinion not included on the course syllabus. Students may choose to build on a previously written essay; however, some revision and a longer page length (at least 4500 words) is expected. Honors and graduate students will add an original research component to this paper.

Participation — 20% of grade

Participation includes in-class discussions and activities and the occasional homework assignment. Students' in-class comments should reflect engagement with the week's readings.

Students are first graded in terms of the quality and quantity of their participation. At that point, the participation grade stands unless the student has more than one unexcused absence. Given the course only meets once each week, the participation grade falls by one full letter grade (e.g., B to C) with each additional unexcused absence (beyond one).

Please see instructor if you anticipate having trouble speaking up during large group discussions.

Group project — 10% of grade

Students will work in small groups of two or three to analyze one facet of Americans' political opinions. These projects must include some original analysis of public opinion data. The final product will be a 10-15 minute class presentation. Presentations will begin in October.

Course Schedule

UNIT 1: FUNDAMENTALS

Monday, August 28: Course introduction, & the problem at hand

- Reading: Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 1927
 - Chapters 10–16

Monday, September 4: Relationship between the public & governing in a democracy

- No class due to Labor Day. Participate in online discussion by end of evening Thursday.
- Reading: John Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems*, 1927
 - Chapters 4, 5, 6

Monday, September 11: The meaning & influence of partisanship

- Reading: Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, & Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, 1960
 - Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6

Monday, September 18: Political ideology

- Reading: Donald R. Kinder & Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*, 2017
 - Chapters 1–6

Monday, September 25: Political independents

- Reading: Samara Klar & Yanna Krupnikov, *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*, 2016
 - Chapters 2–7

UNIT 2: THE ROOTS OF PUBLIC OPINION

Monday, October 2: The role of self-interest

- Reading: Jason Weeden & Robert Kurzban, *The Hidden Agenda of the Political Mind: How Self-Interest Shapes Our Opinions and Why We Won't Admit It*, 2014
 - Chapters 3–6

Monday, October 9: The role of values

- Reading: Paul Goren, *On Voter Competence*, 2013
 - Chapters 1–4, 8

Monday, October 16: The centrality of race to U.S. partisanship

- Reading: Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965*, 2016
 - Chapters 5, 6, 9, 10

Monday, October 23: Political opinion among black Americans

- Reading: Tasha S. Philpot, *Conservative but Not Republican: The Paradox of Party Identification and Ideology among African Americans*, 2017
 - Chapters 3, 4, 5

UNIT 3: CONTEMPORARY TOPICS IN PUBLIC OPINION

Monday, October 30: Media, affective, & factual polarization

- Reading: Markus Prior, “Media and Political Polarization,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 16, 2013
- Reading: Shanto Iyengar & Sean J. Westwood, “Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2015
- Reading: D.J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, & Jason Reifler, “The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics,” *Advances in Political Psychology*, Vol. 38, Suppl. 1, 2017

Monday, November 6: The politics of immigration

- Reading: Marisa Abrajano & Zoltan L. Hajnal, *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*, 2015
 - Chapters 1–4

Monday, November 13: Inequality, public opinion, & representation

- Reading: Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age, Second Edition*, 2016
 - Chapters 3–6

Monday, November 20: Inequality, public opinion, & representation

- Reading: Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age, Second Edition*, 2016
 - Chapters 7–10

Monday, November 27: The emergence of rural resentment

- Reading: Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, 2016.
 - Chapters 1–4

Monday, December 4: More resentment; course wrap-up

- Reading: Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, 2016.
 - Chapters 5–8

Support for Students at AU

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to consult with me or the advisers in the Department of Government/School of Public Affairs. In addition, a wide range of AU services is available to support you:

- Academic Support & Access Center (MGC 243, 202-885-3360). All students may take advantage of the Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) for individual academic skills, counseling, workshops, tutoring and writing assistance, as well as Supplemental Instruction. All services are free. The services include the Writing Center (first floor of Bender Library), which assists students with academic writing and assignments, and the Math/Stat Lab (Myers Building, 202-885-3154), which provides mathematics and statistics tutoring. Additional content tutoring is also available in the ASAC's Tutoring Lab.
 - Students with Disabilities: American University is committed to making learning and programming as accessible as possible. Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability must notify me with a letter of approved accommodations from the ASAC. As the process for registering and requesting accommodations can take some time, and as accommodations, if approved, are not retroactive, I strongly encourage students to contact the ASAC as early as possible. For more information about the process for registering and requesting disability-related accommodations, contact ASAC.
- Counseling Center (MGC 214, 202-885-3500) helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically. They offer individual and group counseling, urgent care, self-help resources, referrals to private care, as well as programming to help students gain the skills and insights needed to overcome adversity and thrive in college. Contact the Counseling Center to make an appointment in person or by telephone, or visit the Counseling Center page on the AU website for additional information.
- Center for Diversity & Inclusion (MGC 201/202, 202-885-3651) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.
- OASIS: The Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (McCabe Hall 123, 202-885-7070, oasis@american.edu) provides free and confidential advocacy services for students who experience sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Please email or call to schedule an appointment with one of the two victim advocates in OASIS.

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The university is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the AU Department of Public Safety (202-885-2527) or the Office of the Dean of Students (202-885-3300, dos@american.edu). To file a Title IX complaint, contact the Title IX Program

Officer (202-885-3373, TitleIX@american.edu). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff - with exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center - who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.

- International Student & Scholar Services (Butler Pavilion, Rm. 410, 202-885-3350, issss@american.edu). Resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and resources.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (american.edu/emergency) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective deans office for course and school/college-specific information.