

## Public Opinion and Voting Behavior

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*Class:* MW 1:00-2:15  
Blegen Hall 120  
*Office Hours:* MW 2:30-3:30  
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### Course Description

Public opinion is one of the most important things in a democracy - or at least that's what we're told. In this course, we will learn more about what public opinion is, how it varies between individuals and groups, and how public opinion is followed (or manipulated) by elites. Using examples from the 2012 and 2016 Presidential elections, students will learn major theories of public opinion and voting behavior in political science, and how to apply them to real world events.

Public opinion research both describes the attitudes that people hold and tries to understand why they hold them. Democratic governance depends on the public, and this class will give you a better understanding of what that public believes, why they believe it, and whether the public can be depended on to make reasonable decisions. As part of this, you will be asked to examine your own beliefs and ultimately conclude whether your attitudes are objective or biased in some way.

This class is organized around two broad sections. In the first section, we will discuss established models and emerging research about public opinion and voting behavior. In the second section, we will apply these models to the example of the 2012 election – and by extension, the 2016 election.

### Goals of the Course

- 1) Introduce major theories of public opinion and voting behavior.
- 2) Develop a greater understanding of political systems and the political lives of ordinary individuals.
- 3) Develop your skills in reading, writing, and productive group discussion.
- 4) Broaden your perspective on politics and improve your capacity to be constructive and critical as consumers of political information.
- 5) Enable you to integrate academia and current events, and apply your knowledge to the 'real world.'

### Student Expectations

This course will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to arrive on time to class, read the assigned readings, and be ready to contribute to the class discussion. It is important to bring the assigned readings to class, so you can refer to them during lecture and discussion. The last section of the syllabus contains general policies about course grades and academic dishonesty.

Late Policy: Extensions will not be given past the due date for the papers. Late papers will be penalized one half letter grade for every day they are late, e.g., one day late turns an A- into a B+, two days late turns an A- into a B, and so on. Moreover, if you cannot be present for an exam, you must arrange a makeup *before* the regularly-scheduled exam date. Exceptions will be made only in the case of illness (with a doctor's note) or extreme circumstances. Incompletes will only be granted under extreme circumstances (e.g., verifiable illness), and with my explicit approval. Moreover, in these cases, both the student and I will need to complete the College of Liberal Arts Agreement for the Completion of Incomplete Work.

Electronic devices: While computers and smart phones greatly increase information-gathering, they can also harm your concentration and the concentration of those around you. Slides will be posted after lectures, so extensive note-taking is unnecessary. Because of this, please refrain from using electronic devices during class. Exceptions will be made for individuals with a relevant accommodation letter from Disability Services, to look up readings, or during in-class exercises that would be facilitated by internet use.

Class environment: This class focuses on contentious issues in political science during a particularly contentious time in US politics overall. We won't avoid controversial discussions when they arise, and it's acceptable to share personal political opinions if they are relevant to the discussion. As we will learn in class, political objectivity seems to be a myth. Civility, on the other hand, is definitely achievable. Please be respectful of other people's beliefs, experiences, and identities. As the instructor, I reserve the right to stop or redirect a discussion if it is becoming detrimental to any student's ability to learn.

### **Requirements**

A) *Reading and Participation*: 10% of final grade

This class will rely heavily on participation. It is crucial that you attend every class having completed and thought about the reading assignment. The participation grade will be made up of attendance and your contribution to in-class activities and group discussions. If participation and discussion is low or it is apparent that many students are not doing the reading assignments, additional in-class quizzes of the reading material will be given and will count towards the participation grade.

B) Exams (3): 60% of final grade

There will be three exams which will each constitute 20% of your grade. Please note the dates for each exam: 10/10, 11/14 and 12/17. While these exams will primarily focus on the readings and lecture for their associated section, exams 2 and 3 may also ask you to integrate earlier lectures and readings.

C) Prediction papers: 30% of final grade

This is a series of papers on the 2016 American Presidential election. Further details can be found in the associated handout. The papers are due in the following sequence, with the following shares of the final grade:

Initial prediction due 9/12: up to 3 points extra credit, added to overall grade.

Revised pre-election prediction due 11/7: 10% of final grade

Review of classmates' pre-election predictions due 11/30: 5% of final grade

Post-election analysis of prediction due 12/14: 15% of final grade

## Grading Scale:

93-100 A	90-92 A-
87-89 B+	83-86 B
80-82 B-	77-79 C+
73-76 C	70-72 C-
67-69 D+	60-66 D
0-59 F	

Readings: We will read the following book, available at the University bookstore or other internet book retailers.

1) John Sides and Lynn Vavreck. 2013. *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election*. Princeton University Press

All other readings are available on Moodle or through JSTOR.

## Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

\* Indicates that this reading is available on Moodle.

Sept. 7: Introduction

Sept. 12: The Role of Public Opinion in a Democracy

### Initial Prediction Due

James Madison. 1788. "Federalist No. 10." Available at,

<https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers#TheFederalistPapers-10>

Burke, Edmund. 1774. "Speech to the Electors of Bristol." Available at,

<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html>

Douglass, Frederick. 1865. "What the Black Man Wants." Available at,

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-the-black-man-wants/>

Bakunin, Mikhail. 1870. "On Representative Government and Universal Suffrage."\*

Sept. 14: Methods and measurement

Roll Jr., Charles W. and Albert H. Cantril. 1972. *Polls*. Excerpts of Ch. 1 & 3.\*

Pew Research Center. 2016. "Flashpoints in Polling." Available at,

<http://www.pewresearch.org/2016/08/01/flashpoints-in-polling/>

Jonathon Schuldt, Sara H. Konrath, and Norbert Schwarz. 2011. "'Global Warming' or 'Climate Change'? Whether the Planet is Warming Depends on Question Wording." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75.1: 115-124.

Sept. 19-21: Rational Actor Model

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Ch.1 excerpt, Ch. 3, 11, & 13.\*

Berry, Christopher R., and William G. Howell. 2007. "Accountability and local elections: Rethinking retrospective voting." *Journal of Politics* 69.3: 844-858.

Sears, David O., Richard R. Lau, Tom R. Tyler, and Harris M. Allen, Jr. 1980. "Self-Interest vs. Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting." *American Political Science Review*, 74.3: 670-684.

Sept. 26-28: Michigan Model

Delli Carpini, M. X. 2005. "An overview of the state of citizens' knowledge about politics." In M. S. McKinney, L. L. Kaid, D. G. Bystrom, & D. B. Carlin (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Engaging the public in democratic life*: 27-40. Access at:

[http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=asc\\_papers](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=asc_papers)

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald R. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. Ch. 7-9.\*

Oct. 3-5: Heuristics, Saliency, and Opinion Leadership

Lau, Richard R., and David P. Redlawsk. 2001. "Advantages and disadvantages of cognitive heuristics in political decision making." *American Journal of Political Science*, 45.4: 951-971.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Ch. 2-3.\*

Lenz, Gabriel S. 2012. *Follow the Leader*. Ch. 8.\*

Oct. 10: **Exam 1**

## Oct. 12: Media effects

Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters*. Ch. 1 & 3.\*  
Mutz, Diana C. 2007. "Effects of "in-your-face" television discourse on perceptions of a legitimate opposition." *American Political Science Review* 101.4: 621-635.

## Oct. 17: Motivated Reasoning

Kunda, Ziva. 1990. "The case for motivated reasoning." *Psychological Bulletin* 108.3: 480-498.  
Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions." *Political Behavior* 32.2: 303-330.

## Oct. 19: Core values

Goren, Paul. 2013. *On Voter Competence*. Ch. 1 & 8.\*

## Oct. 24: Morals

Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian A. Nosek. 2009. "Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96.5: 1029-1046.  
Barnea, Marina F., and Shalom H. Schwartz. 1998. "Values and voting." *Political Psychology* 19.1: 17-40.

## Oct. 26: Authoritarianism

Stenner, Karen. 2005. *The Authoritarian Dynamic*. Excerpts from Ch. 1 & 2.\*  
Hetherington, Marc, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2011. "Authoritarianism, threat, and Americans' support for the war on terror." *American Journal of Political Science* 55.3: 546-560.

## Oct. 31: Ethnocentrism

Kinder, Donald R. and Cindy D. Kam. 2009. *Us Against Them*. Ch. 2, excerpt of Ch. 3, Ch. 6.\*

## Nov. 2: Pre-election discussion

## Nov. 7: Genetics

Hibbing, John R., Kevin B. Smith and John R. Alford. 2014. *Predisposed*. Ch. 6.\*  
**Revised Pre-Election Prediction Due**

## Nov. 9: Post-election discussion

Nov. 14: **Exam 2**

## Nov. 16: Retrospective voting

Sides, John and Lynn Vavreck. 2012. *The Gamble* Ch. 1-2

## Nov. 21: Media cycles

*The Gamble* Ch. 3

## Nov. 23: CANCELLED for Thanksgiving travel

## Nov. 28: Demographics

*The Gamble*. Ch.4

Nov. 30: Campaign effects

*The Gamble* Ch. 5

**Review of Classmates' Predictions Due**

Dec. 5: Partisan sorting

*The Gamble* Ch. 6

Dec. 7: What makes a winner?

*The Gamble* Ch. 7-8

Dec 12: What was different this year?

Readings TBA

Dec. 14: Catch-up day/Test review

**Post-Election Analysis Due**

Dec. 17: **Final Exam**

**Note that the final will be on a Saturday, 10.30am-12.30pm in Blegen 120.**

## **Policy Statements for Syllabi**

### **Student Conduct Code:**

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected adhere to Board of Regents Policy: *Student Conduct Code*. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see:

[http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student\\_Conduct\\_Code.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf).

Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities."

### **Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom:**

The University establishes the right of each faculty member to determine if and how personal electronic devices are allowed to be used in the classroom. For complete information, please reference: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

### **Scholastic Dishonesty:**

You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. If it is determined that a student has cheated, he or she may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see:

<http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/INSTRUCTORRESP.html>.

The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty:

<http://www1.umn.edu/oscai/integrity/student/index.html>. If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course.

### **Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences:**

Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html>.

### **Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials:**

Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond

the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

### **Grading and Transcripts:**

The University utilizes plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale. The two grading systems used are the ABCDF and S-N. Political science majors and minors must take POL courses on the ABCDF system. An S grade is the equivalent of a C- or better. Inquiries regarding grade changes should be directed to the course instructor. Extra work in an attempt to raise a grade can only be submitted with the instructor's approval.

For additional information, please refer to:

<http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADINGTRANSCRIPTS.html>.

### **Incompletes:**

The instructor will specify the conditions, if any, under which an "Incomplete" will be assigned instead of a grade. No student has an automatic right to an incomplete. The instructor may set dates and conditions for makeup work.

### **Sexual Harassment**

"Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment in any University activity or program. Such behavior is not acceptable in the University setting. For additional information, please consult Board of Regents Policy:

<http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/SexHarassment.pdf>

### **Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action:**

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents

Policy: [http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Equity\\_Diversity\\_EO\\_AA.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Equity_Diversity_EO_AA.pdf).

### **Disability Accommodations:**

The University of Minnesota is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical), please contact DS at 612-626-1333 to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

If you are registered with DS and have a current letter requesting reasonable accommodations, please contact your instructor as early in the semester as possible to discuss how the accommodations will be applied in the course.

For more information, please see the DS website, <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>.

**Mental Health and Stress Management:**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

**Academic Freedom and Responsibility:**

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.

Students are responsible for class attendance and all course requirements, including deadlines and examinations. The instructor will specify if class attendance is required or counted in the grade for the class.