

Public Opinion & Political Behavior – Political Science #340
{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}
Illinois Wesleyan University
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Course description and requirements:

This course will survey many of the major themes in studies of American public opinion and political behavior. The primary questions running through this course ask about the normative and empirical roles public opinion and civic involvement play in our democratic system. To answer those questions the course material is grouped into six segments:

- 1) *Defining democracy*: How do we define democracy, and how does that definition shape our normative standards for citizens and leaders?
- 2) *The mechanics of measuring public opinion*: How do we measure (and mis-measure) public opinion?
- 3) *Political behavior*: Why do people vote, protest, and engage in other forms of political participation (or not)?
- 4) *Media influence on opinion*: What roles do the mass media play in opinion formation and transmission?
- 5) *Connections between individual opinion and political behavior*: How does what we know/believe affect how we act politically?
- 6) *Theories of systemic opinion-policy linkages*: How do public opinion and participation affect political outcomes?

Readings include one survey text (Erikson & Tedin), which contains chapters on most of the themes for the course, and three other texts that address specific aspects of belief and opinion formation and their impact on individual behavior and systemic outcomes. All the texts are required. Beyond this, additional readings are assigned throughout the semester and can be found on the library's electronic reserve system. Some weeks' reading assignments are more extensive than others'. Reading ahead is strongly encouraged. Lectures and class discussions will not always cover the same material as the readings, so both reading and regular class attendance are necessary to do well in the course. Because many of the learning opportunities will come through class discussions, students must be prepared to discuss assigned readings in class. Completing the each week's readings prior to Monday's meeting is very important.

Students' grades will be based on 2 essay-type exams, two short papers, and class participation. Each exam is worth 30% of the overall course grade. Each short paper is worth 15% of the course grade. Finally, participation in class discussions and activities comprises the remaining 10%. A few days before each exam I will distribute a list of questions resembling, but not identical to, the questions you will face on the up-coming exam. The purpose is to give you a framework for study. These should be taken as a rough indicator of the level of difficulty and style of the questions that will appear on the exams. Taking an exam at any time other than in class on the designated exam date requires advance approval from me.

Regarding the two short papers, each should critique a set of assigned readings. For each, you are to compare and contrast 3 pieces of writing by 3 different authors from the syllabus that speak to a common theme. Individual pieces of writing may consist of a single article or particularly meaty book chapter, or you may consider the overall argument from an entire book as one of the 3 pieces. Your paper should spend minimal time summarizing the readings (I already know what they say; you don't have to tell me) and should focus on *your critique and/or synthesis* of the arguments and evidence offered by the authors.

These are reflection papers, not book reports. One possibly good approach would be to find pieces of literature that are reputed to contradict each other and then to find a plausible way to reconcile them. Another would be to apply one text as a critique of another in a way that sheds light on a problem not already solved by others. Other fruitful tactics are available. Use your imagination. Each paper must be between 5 and 6 pages long, double-spaced. Due dates appear below. Late papers will be accepted but will suffer a 5 percentage point reduction for each day they are late, weekends and holidays included. To save paper, please feel free to print these papers double-sided.

Grading policy and statement on academic integrity:

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Under no circumstances will a student be granted an incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester. All other university policies apply.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

The following course texts are available at the university bookstore:

American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact, 7th edition, Robert Erikson and Kent Tedin (Pearson – Longman publishers, 2005)

Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics, James Stimson (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy, Manza, Cook and Page (editors), Oxford University Press, 2002. [referred to below as “*Navigating*”]

Political Behavior of the American Electorate, 11th edition, William Flanigan and Nancy Zingale (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2005)

The following readings have been placed on electronic reserve

Philip Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, David Apter (ed) (Free Press, 1964)

Herbert Blumer, “Public opinion and public opinion polling,” *American Sociological Review*, 1948.

Frank Newport, *Polling Matters*, chapter 8 (Warner Books, 2004)

Sam Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter, 2nd ed.*, chapt. 1-3, 10 (University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Martin Wattenberg, *Where have all the voters gone?*, chapters 3-5, 8 (Harvard U. Press, 2002)

Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*, chapters 6 & 7 (Longman, 2003)

Caroll Glynn et al., *Public Opinion*, 2nd ed., chapter 7 (Westview Press, 2004)

Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chapter 2 (Wiley, 1960)

Warren Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter*, chapter 8 (Harvard U. Press, 1996)

“Public Policy Linkages,” Alan Monroe and Paul Gardner, Jr., in *Research in Micropolitics*, volume 2, Samuel Long, editor (JAI Press, Inc., 1987)

“Effects of Public Opinion on Policy,” Ben Page and Robert Shapiro, in *American Political Science Review* 77: 175-190 (1983) [via J-STOR]

Robert Eisinger, *The Evolution of presidential polling*, chapter 9 (Cambridge U. Press, 2003)

Topics	Readings
The fundamentals of public opinion, citizen participation, and democratic government	Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 1 Flanigan & Zingale, chapt. 1
Measuring public opinion	Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 2 <i>Navigating</i> , introduction Flanigan & Zingale, appendix
Measuring public opinion	<i>Navigating</i> , chapt. 9, 12, 13, 15 Newport chapter Blumer article
Citizens’ cognitive sophistication	Converse article Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 3
Political learning and low-information rationality	Popkin, chapt. 1-3, 10 Lupia et al., chapt. 3
Individual versus aggregate opinion	Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 4 (skim) Stimson, preface, chapt. 1-3, 6, and skim chapt. 5) <i>Navigating</i> , chapt. 2, 3, 4
Ideology, partisanship, and democratic values	Flanigan & Zingale, chapt. 3, 4, 6 Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 5, 6

First reflection paper due

Models of vote choice

Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chapt. 2
Miller and Shanks, *The New American Voter*, chapt. 8

Mid-term exam

Political participation

Wattenberg, chapt. 3-5, 8
Flanigan & Zingale, chapt. 2 & 8

Political participation

Glynn et al., *Public Opinion*, chapt. 7
Rosenstone & Hansen, chapt. 6, 7

The media and public opinion

Iyengar & Kinder, chapt. 1-3, 6, 7,
10-12 (read this first)
Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 8
Flanigan & Zingale, chapt. 7

Opinion-policy linkages

Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 9 & 10
Monroe & Gardner article
Eisinger chapter 9
Page & Shapiro article

Opinion-policy linkages

Navigating, chapt. 7, 11

Second reflection paper due

Why should/do public opinion
and citizen involvement matter?

Navigating, chapt. 17, 18
Erikson & Tedin, chapt. 11

Final exam: cumulative with emphasis on material since mid-term exam