

# POLS 4510

## Public Opinion & American Democracy

Days:	Monday-Wednesday-Friday	Instructor:	Dr. Ben Kantack
Time:	12:20PM-1:10PM	Office:	380B Baldwin Hall
Room:	102 Baldwin Hall	Email:	ben.kantack@uga.edu
Office Hours:	Tuesday 10:00AM-11:00AM (or by appointment)	Telephone:	706-542-8203

### Course Description

*There is no such thing as public opinion.*  
- Winston Churchill

Democratic governance is predicated on the notion that public opinion can and should drive public policy. But what is meant by the term “public opinion?” From where does it originate? What are its contents? Under what conditions does it ossify or fluctuate? Most importantly, does public opinion actually determine the actions of government – and, to the extent that it does, is that a good thing?

The purpose of this course is to assess American democracy from a public opinion perspective. It is oriented around three fundamental questions. First, what is public opinion, and what causes it? Second, what do Americans think about politics? Third, is American public opinion up to the challenge of democratic citizenship? We will explore each of these questions by reading and engaging with political science scholarship to better understand the dynamics of public opinion in the United States and its implications for democratic government.

### Required Reading

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be assigned for all but five class sessions and will primarily consist of political science journal articles and book chapters. Academic writing is often dense. For that reason, we will spend the second class session developing tools for reading political science research.

All readings will be accessible via [eLearningCommons](#). The finalized reading list will be distributed no later than the first day of class. Students will be expected to complete all readings before the class sessions for which they are assigned.

### Grading

Grades will be allocated as follows:

- *Discussion* (20% of final grade): Weeks marked with an asterisk (\*) in the course schedule will feature an online discussion activity, in which students will be randomly sorted into small groups to discuss the week’s topics and readings. Students will be required to complete one initial post by **11:59PM on Thursday** and at least one response post by **11:59PM on Friday**. Additional responses are encouraged but will not be required. Participation will be graded based on whether it demonstrates understanding of course concepts and is germane to the discussion.

- *Reading quizzes* (10% of final grade): If online and in-class discussion demonstrates a satisfactory level of reading comprehension, no reading quizzes will be administered and all students will receive full credit for this component of their final grade. If online and in-class discussion demonstrates an unsatisfactory level of reading comprehension, reading quizzes will be administered randomly at the beginning of certain class sessions. Reading quizzes cannot be made up before or after the fact by students who are late or absent to the class sessions in which they are administered. In the event that reading quizzes are administered, each student's two lowest quiz grades will be automatically dropped from their final grade calculation.
- *Analysis paper* (25% of final grade): Throughout the course, students will learn about the theoretical and practical role of public opinion in American democracy. This learning will culminate in an analysis paper in which students will assess the quality of American democracy from a public opinion perspective. Further details will be provided in class.
- *Exams* (45% of final grade): Three equally-weighted exams will be given. Two will take place during regular class sessions; the third will be held during the final exam period, but will be roughly the same size and difficulty as the first two. Exams will be designed to be non-cumulative; however, knowledge of the contents of an early exam may indirectly influence performance on a later exam.

Late discussion posts and analysis papers will be penalized 10% for every full or partial day that elapses before they are submitted.

## Grading Scale

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

## Extra Credit Policy

From time to time, extra credit may be offered in the context of in-class activities. These extra credit opportunities will be conditional upon attendance and cannot be made up under any circumstances. No other forms of extra credit will be available.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance will not be graded. Physical presence in a classroom is correlated with, but does not in and of itself constitute, academic achievement. Students who are late or absent should consult their fellow classmates to obtain any desired notes regarding what they missed. Note-taking aids will be posted to [eLearningCommons](#), but lecture slides will not be disseminated outside of class. Students who are absent from class sessions in which exams are held must notify the instructor before the start of said class session to initiate the process of scheduling a make-up exam. If the instructor is not notified of the absence until the start of the class session, a 10% penalty will be assessed for each full or partial day that elapses until a make-up exam has been scheduled.

## **Discussion Policy**

Discussion enhances learning when participants are able to express their views without fear of reprisal, presume good faith in their interlocutors, and abide by standards of civility and decorum. Students should feel free to respectfully challenge their peers' opinions, and should expect to have their own opinions respectfully challenged by their peers or by the instructor.

## **Electronic Devices Policy**

The use of laptop computers and tablets will be permitted for class purposes only. The use of telephones will not be permitted. Students whose use of electronic devices becomes disruptive will be asked to discontinue said use and may be asked to leave the room.

## **Academic Integrity Policy**

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in "A Culture of Honesty" found at <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

## **Disability Accommodation Policy**

Students desiring disability accommodations should consult the [Disability Resource Center](#) and should notify the instructor as soon as possible.

## Course Schedule

*NOTE: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.*

### **WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION**

Friday, January 5                      Course Introduction

### **WEEK 2: THE BASICS\***

Monday, January 8                      How to Read Political Science

Wednesday, January 10                      How to Measure Public Opinion

Friday, January 12                      History of Public Opinion

### **WEEK 3: ATTITUDES\***

Monday, January 15                      NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Wednesday, January 17                      Attitudes, Part I

Friday, January 19                      Attitudes, Part II

### **WEEK 4: FOUNDATIONS\***

Monday, January 22                      Socialization

Wednesday, January 24                      Personality

Friday, January 26                      Biology & Genetics

### **WEEK 5: IDENTITIES & VALUES\***

Monday, January 29                      Values

Wednesday, January 31                      Group Identity

Friday, February 2                      Race & Ethnicity

**WEEK 6: STRUCTURES\***

Monday, February 5            Media  
Wednesday, February 7       Ideology  
Friday, February 9            Partisanship

**WEEK 7: POLICY POSITIONS**

Monday, February 12         **EXAM I**  
Wednesday, February 14      Policies  
Friday, February 16          Polarization

**WEEK 8: DEMOCRATIC NORMS\***

Monday, February 19         Trust  
Wednesday, February 21      Civil Liberties  
Friday, February 23          Tolerance

**WEEK 9: KNOWLEDGE & IGNORANCE\***

Monday, February 26         Trust  
Wednesday, February 28      Civil Liberties  
Friday, March 2                Tolerance

**WEEK 10: MEMORY & EMOTION\***

Monday, March 5              Affect & Emotion  
Wednesday, March 7          Memory, Part I  
Friday, March 9                Memory, Part II

**WEEK 11: SPRING BREAK**

**WEEK 12: VOTE CHOICE**

Monday, March 19	<b>EXAM II</b>
Wednesday, March 21	Rational Choice
Friday, March 23	Retrospective Voting

**WEEK 13: INFORMATION PROCESSING\***

Monday, March 26	Information
Wednesday, March 28	Misinformation
Friday, March 30	Motivated Reasoning

**WEEK 14: ACCOUNTABILITY**

Monday, April 2	Opinion Manipulation
Wednesday, April 4	NO CLASS – MPSA CONFERENCE
Friday, April 6	NO CLASS – MPSA CONFERENCE

**WEEK 15: FALLING SHORT\***

Monday, April 9	Process Desires
Wednesday, April 11	Funny Business
Friday, April 13	Inequality

**WEEK 16: ELIXIRS\***

Monday, April 16	Education
Wednesday, April 18	Deliberation
Friday, April 20	Macro Opinion

**Analysis paper due via email at 11:59PM on Friday, April 20**

**WEEK 17: CONCLUSION**

Monday, April 23	Catchup/Review
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**FINAL EXAM: MONDAY, APRIL 30 (12:00PM-3:00PM)**