POLS 8790 Special Topics in American Politics: Public Opinion
Spring 2021
Tuesdays, 6:50-9:00pm
Online Delivery

Instructor: Dr. Geoffrey Sheagley
Office: Baldwin Hall 380G
Email: geoff.sheagley@uga.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This seminar is introduction to U.S. public opinion research. We will cover a variety of topics in this area, ranging from the sources and structurers of political attitudes to the representation of these preferences by political elites. Throughout the course our focus will be on public opinion of the mass public rather than the opinions of political elites and elected officials. In addition to examining substantive themes, we will address issues of methodology, like how researchers measure the concepts they are studying, different empirical approaches to studying public opinion, and the effectiveness of different statistical techniques scholars employ to answer their questions. Finally, we will examine the normative implications of the research in this area to assess the health of American democracy.

Structure

This is a seminar and participation by everybody is essential to us having a successful semester. The course will revolve around thoughtful discussion of the course material and I expect everybody to come to class prepared to discuss the following questions about each reading:

1. What are the research questions?
2. How the author(s) define and measure the concepts they are studying? Are these valid and/or reliable measures?
3. What’s the theory? What are the hypotheses?
4. What methodological strategy or strategies do they employ to test these hypotheses?
5. Key findings? How dependent of measurement and/or research design are the findings?
6. How do the findings from a given paper fit into the broader theme of a given week? In other words, how does the reader “speak” to other readings this week?
7. What are the implications for how we understand public opinion and American democracy?
8. What questions remain unanswered?

Assignments & Expectations

Attendance & Participation – You are expected to attend every class, read all materials carefully, and contribute to all seminar discussions. In short, you are expected to actively participate in every single class. If you are not participating, you are hurting yourself & your chance to be successful in this class.
Readings – In addition to the required books, each week we will read academic articles. I expect that you will locate most of the readings for class. At times I will provide the reading for you by posting it to eLC. Those readings are noted in the syllabus.

Reaction Paper – Each student will be required to write a one-page (single-spaced) reaction paper every other week. The paper should cover a broad topic discussed in multiple articles, a book, or all of the readings for a week. The papers should be emailed to the class by 5pm on the Monday before class.

Short Paper & Discussion Leader – Each student is required to write a 7-page (double-spaced) paper on the readings for one session during the semester. The student will also lead seminar discussion this session. The paper and the discussion should address the questions raised in the “structure” section above. The paper should be emailed to the class by 5pm on the Monday before class.

Final Presentation – Our final class session will be devoted to students presenting the results from their final papers. Details will be provided during the semester.

Term Paper - You are required to complete a 25-page term paper, due Tuesday, May 4 by 5:00pm. The paper should be roughly 20 pages of text with the being some combination of tables, figures, appendices, and references. Email me a digital copy by the deadline. Late papers will be accepted only under extraordinary conditions. There are three options for the paper:

1. Literature Review: Identify a body of literature on a topic(s) that you would like to examine in depth. The paper must (1) identify the research questions that animate this body of work and explain why the questions are important; (2) elaborate the key concepts and theoretical frameworks in the literature; (3) summarize the types of data scholars have examined and explain how they key concepts have been measured; (4) summarize the key findings and assess the persuasiveness of the evidence; and (5) offer two new research questions the extant literature has failed to address and/or answer.

2. Research Design: Specify a question (or set of questions) that you would like to examine and then develop a plan that will let you to answer it. The paper must (1) describe the research question(s) and explain why it’s important; (2) review the relevant literature and explain how your study contributes to it; (3) define the concepts, develop a theoretical framework, and derive testable hypotheses from this framework; (4) describe the data you plan to collect and how the key concepts will be measured; and (5) explain how you plan to analyze the data.

3. Research Paper: Specify a question (or set of questions) that you would like to examine and then conduct original research to answer it. The paper must (1) describe the research question(s) and explain why it’s important; (2) review the relevant literature and explain how your study contributes to it; (3) define the concepts, develop a theoretical framework, and derive testable hypotheses from this framework; (4) collect data and describe how the key concepts are measured; and (5) analyze these relationships using appropriate methods.
**Required Books** (order online; not available in campus bookstore)


**Grading**

The following are the areas in which you will receive points in this class and the weight that each area has on your final grade.

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Reaction papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Paper &amp; Discussion Leader</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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I use the following scale when assigning letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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**Course Policies**

**Valid Absence Excuses**

If you have a significant conflict that causes you to miss class (e.g., a personal, family, or medical emergency), you should email me within a week of the missed due date to make sure you can complete the assignment or exam in a timely manner.

**Academic Honesty**

The University of Georgia has an academic honesty policy. Academic integrity is required for a positive learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else’s work as
your own, can result in disciplinary action. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an F in the course. Additionally, I will forward your name to the University. You can read the policies in their entirety here: https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/Definitions-for-Purposes-of-this-Policy/

Disability resource center

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional information can be found here: http://drc.uga.edu/

Course Schedule

Below you will find the schedule for our semester. This schedule is tentative and I reserve the right to make changes as we proceed through the semester.

Week 1 (1/19)– Foundations & Course Overview

Foundations
1. Lippman, Walter. 1922. Public Opinion (Ch. 1, pp. 3-20) eLC
2. Key, V.O. 1961. Public Opinion and American Democracy (Ch. 1, pp. 3-18) eLC
3. Zaller (Ch. 2) eLC

Methods – Experiments & Surveys

Week 2 (1/26)– Ideology (Group A)

**Week 3 (2/2) – Party Identification 1 – The Michigan Model & Group Identity** (Group B)

**Week 4 (2/9) – Party Identification 2 – Revisionist Theories & Additional Perspectives** (Group A)
   a. Rogers, Steven. 2019. “Sobering up after “Partisan intoxication or policy voting?” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15(2)

**Week 5 (2/16) – Issues and Opinion Change** (Group B)
4. Lenz, Gabriel S. 2012. *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians’ Policies and Performance.* Chapters 1-3; 8

Week 6 (2/23)– Political Polarization (Group A)

Week 7 (3/2) – Political Knowledge/Sophistication (Group B)

Week 8 (3/9) – Identity 1: Race and Racial Attitudes (Group A)


**Week 9 (3/16)** – A class break taking place in early spring

**Week 10 (3/23) – Identity 2: Gender** (Group B)


**Week 11 (3/30) - Identity 3: Place** (Group A)


**Week 12 (4/6) - Trust in Gov’t & Views of lawmaking** (Group B)


Week 13 (4/13)– Representation – Mass-Elite Opinion Convergence

Public Responsiveness to Elite Behavior

Elite Responsiveness to Mass Opinion

Week 14 (4/20) – Choose your own Adventure
Students should pair up to identify a research paper that they want to discuss this week. The paper needs to be identified by the start of class on 4/13 and should be distributed to the class by then. Students are responsible for reading all of the papers this week.

• 5/4 - Final paper due by 5:00pm.