

Pol377: Public Opinion and Democracy

Paul Gronke
Phone: 517-7393
Office Hours: Mon, 1–3 pm and by appt

205A Eliot Hall
email: gronke@reed.edu

Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol370-s03>

Course Description: Coming to grips with public opinion is, in the words of one analyst, akin to coming to grip with the Holy Ghost. In this course, we attempt to survey the sprawling literature dealing with American public opinion. We begin with the question I always ask: “So what?” There are two parts to this question. First, what are our theoretical notions of citizenship in a democracy, and in society generally. What *should* citizens know? Second, what is the role of public opinion in a representative democracy, and how does that differ from other governmental systems? Next, we turn to the empirical evidence, hopefully always keeping in mind our main questions. What *do* people think and know? Can public opinion play the role we expect of it? If not, what function does it seem to have in American democracy?

The potential topics for this course are vast. This is one of my areas of research interest. Thus, the readings for this course are heavy and often quite complicated, the writing assignments are frequent, and my expectations are high. You should know ahead of time that much of the reading is heavily quantitative (as is much of the public opinion literature).

For this semester, we will cover some portion of the public opinion literature on:

- The nature of public opinion (theory, measurement)
- What the public knows, how it learns, and why it matters
- Alternative models of public opinion
- Racial attitudes in the U.S.
- Trust in government

I hope you will leave the course with a better understanding of the role of public opinion in democracy, what the public feels on a variety of topics, and an appreciation for the complexities inherent in measuring public opinion.

An important part of your performance in this class will be determined by **three** analysis/review pieces and in-class presentations. For **two** of these papers, you are required to review the week’s materials, identify one or more interesting points, and evaluate and critique the argument or arguments in the readings. This paper is intended to be more than just a summary of one or a few arguments, but it is also not meant to be a simple personal reaction piece. It is better to think of these papers, as a brief critical essay or perhaps a research design. They are not summaries and they are not simple arguments. I expect normal rules of paper structure to be followed, including thesis paragraphs, inline or footnoted citations, and the like. The paper must be turned in to me **noon the day before your presentation**. This is an absolute deadline. Otherwise, I will be unable to prepare sufficiently for class. The **third** paper will be a comment and critique of the *Stealth Democracy* book. All students will write this paper.

For the presentation, you are required to lead the conference for at least part of the time (approximately 10-15 minutes), identifying interesting, controversial, or intellectually challenging aspects of the readings; asking your colleagues questions; and in general helping us identify what you believe are the important parts of these readings.

Assessments:

- Examinations: Take home ten page final (open book, essay) distributed the last week of class, due at the time of the final: (50%)
- Papers: Three analysis/review/thought pieces, roughly 3-5 double spaced pages apiece and class leadership(40%)
- Class Attendance and Participation (10%)

Readings: The following books can be purchased at the Reed College Bookstore. The books are also at the reserve desk.

- Herbst, Susan. *Numbered Voices*
- P. Sniderman, P. Tetlock, and R. Brody, *Reasoning and Choice*
- Mendelberg, Tali. *The Race Card*
- Glynn, Herbst, Keefe, and Shapiro. *Public Opinion*
- Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo. *Racial Attitudes in America*
- Hibbing and Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy*

Many readings are available at the Reed library reserve room. These may be books or articles held on reserve. We have lengthy readings from the following books, and the library owns multiple copies, so these will not be on e-reserve: Key, V.O. *Public Opinion and American Democracy* and Apter, David *Ideology and Discontent* (the Converse reading is in this book).

Please note that many readings are from the JSTOR system (<http://www.jstor.org>). This is an online repository of scholarly work. All Reed students *must* be acquainted with this system. It is available through any on campus machine, or through off campus machines if you have validated your Reed identity through the library gateway. Talk to me or to a librarian if you have any questions.

Course Plan

1. Jan 28–Jan 30 *A Original Practitioner’s View and a Current Critique*
 - George Gallup, “Testing Public Opinion”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2:1(Jan 1938), 8-14 (JSTOR)
 - George Gallup, “Polls and the Political Process-Past, Present, and Future”, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29:4 (Winter 1965-5) 544-49 (JSTOR)
 - Hitchens, Christopher. ”Voting in the Passive Voice: What Polling has done to American democracy.” *Harpers* Vol 284, April 1992, p. 45-53. To be handed out in class.
 - Green, Joshua. ”The Other War Room.” *Washington Monthly*, February 4, 2001. Available here: <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0204.green.html>
2. Feb 4 *Introduction: What Is Public Opinion?*
 - Lippman, Walter. *Public Opinion*, p. 3-20.
 - VO Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. Ch. 1, p. 3-18.
 - Glynn, Chs. 1–2.
3. Feb 6 *How do we measure public opinion?*
 - Glynn Ch. 3
 - Weissberg, Robert. ”Why Policymakers should ignore public opinion polls.” *Policy Analysis* No. 402 (available from gronke)
4. Feb 11–13 *Alternative “Shapes” of Public Opinion*
 - Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, Chs. 2–4
 - Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, Ch. 1–3.
5. Feb 18 *An Overview of Theories of Opinion Formation*
 - Glynn, Chs. 4-6
6. Feb 20 *An Elite-Centered Model of Information and Learning*
 - Elite Discourse: Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* Chs. 2-3
7. Feb 25–27 *The Classic Statement of Mass Uninformedness*

- Philip Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” In David Apter, *Ideology and Discontent* (book on reserve).
 - Glynn, Ch. 8 pg. 249-263
8. March 4–6 *The Revisionist Response: The “New Look” Approach*
- Paul Sniderman, “The New Look in Public Opinion Research” (reserve)
 - Glynn, Ch. 8, pg. 263-297
 - Heuristics and Cues: Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Chs. 1-3
9. Mar 11–13.....*Beliefs about Democracy*
- Langer, Gary. “Trust in Government...to do What?” *The Public Perspective*, July/August 2002.
 - Pew Research Center. “Deconstructing Trust: How Americans View Government.” Available here: <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=95>
 - Glynn, Ch. 10
 - Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 7
 - Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, Chs. 1–3
10. Mar 17–21 *Fall Break*
11. Mar 25–27*American Trust in Government*
- Hibbing and Theiss Morse, *Stealth Democracy*, 4–9
 - *All students must write a 3-5 page critique of Stealth Democracy, due Wednesday by noon*
 - Robert Putnam. “Bowling Alone.” *Journal of Democracy* 6:1, Jan 1995, 65-78. Online at http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/journal_of_democracy/v006/putnam.html
12. Apr 1 *Racial Attitudes in the U.S., Part I*
- Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, Chs. 1–3
13. Apr 3 *No Class this Thursday*
14. Apr 8–April 10..... *A “New Racism” in the U.S.?*
- Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, Chs. 4–6
 - Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock. Chs. 4-5, 11-13
 - Sniderman and Tetlock. “Symbolic Racism: Problems of Motive Attribution in Political Analysis” and ”Reflections”
 - Kinder, Donald. “The Continuing American Dilemma: White Resistance to Racial Change 40 Years After Myrdal.” Both articles from *Journal of Social Issues* 42(3, March 1986).
15. April 15–April 17 *The Impact of Race: American Campaigns and Elections*
- Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card*. Entire book.
16. Apr 22–Apr 24 *Does Citizen Knowledge Matter to Democracy?*
- Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*, Chs. 1–2
 - Glynn, Ch. 7
 - Lupia and McCubbins, *The Democratic Dilemma*, Chs. 1–2
17. April 29-May 1 *Alternative Models of Public Opinion*
- Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, Chs. 4-8.
 - Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Ch. 14