

Pol377: Public Opinion and Democracy

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Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol370-s02>

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
- 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 the 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.

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: Two analysis/review/thought pieces, roughly 3-5 double spaced pages apiece (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.

- Delli Carpini and Zeeter. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*
- 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. *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?*

Many readings are available at the Reed library reserve room. These may be books or articles held on reserve, although I will try to get as many readings as possible on the online reserve system. 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 *Democracy 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 22–Jan 24 *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)
 - Each student needs to bring to class polling data from a newspaper or online resource to discuss in class.
 - Hitchens, Christopher. ”Voting in the Passive Voice: What Polling has done to American democracy.” *Harpers* Vol 284, April 1992 (reserve and outside my office).
 - Lippman, Walter. *Public Opinion*, p. 3-20 (reserve and outside my office)
2. Jan 29 *No Class*
3. Jan 31 *Introduction: What Is Public Opinion?*
 - VO Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. Ch. 1, p. 3-18 (reserve)
 - Glynn, Chs. 1–2
4. Feb 5 *How do we measure public opinion? What is the “shape” of public opinion*
 - Glynn Ch. 3
 - Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, Chs. 2–4 (reserve)
5. Feb 7 *An Overview of Theories of Opinion Formation*
 - Glynn, Chs. 4-6
6. Feb 12 *Does Citizen Knowledge Matter?*
 - Delli Carpini and Keeter, Chs. 1
 - Glynn, Ch. 7
7. Feb 14 *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. Feb 19 *The Revisionist Response: The “New Look” Approach*
 - Paul Sniderman, “The New Look in Public Opinion Research” (reserve)
 - Glynn, Ch. 8, pg. 263-297
 9. Feb 21 *What Do Americans Know About Politics?*
 - Delli Carpini and Keeter, Chs. 2-4
 10. Feb 26–Feb 28 *Alternative Models of Information and Learning*
 - Correlational: Delli Carpini and Keeter, Ch. 5
 - Elite Discourse: Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* Chs. 2-3 (reserve)
 - Heuristics and Cues: Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Chs. 1-2
 - Psychological theory: Otatti and Wyer. “The Cognitive Mediators of Political Choice: Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Political Information Processing.” From Ferejohn and Kuklinski, *Information and Democratic Processes*. (reserve)
 11. Mar 5 *What is Information Used For: Models of Political Reasoning*
 - Delli Carpini and Keeter, Ch. 6
 - Milton Lodge and Ruth Hamill. “A Partisan Schema for Information Processing.” *American Political Science Review* 80(2, June 1986): 505-519 (JSTOR)
 12. Mar 7 *Current Public Opinion Discussion*
 - This day is allocated if we fall behind; if not, we will take this opportunity to reflect on the first half materials
 13. Mar 19 *Applications: The Likability and Ideology Heuristics*
 - Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock. Chs. 6-8.
 14. Mar 21–Mar 26 *Racial Attitudes in the U.S.*
 - Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, entire book
 15. Mar 28–April 2 *A “New Racism” in the U.S.?*
 - 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). (reserve)
 16. April 4–April 9..... *The Impact of Race: American Campaigns and Elections*
 - Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card*. Entire book.
 17. April 11..... *An American Crisis of Dis-Trust in Government and Institutions?*
 - Hibbing and Theiss Morse, Part 1
 - Glynn, Ch. 10
 18. April 16–April 18 *What Institutions do we like? What do we dislike?*
 - Hibbing and Theiss Morse, Part 2

- Gronke and Feaver, “Uncertain Confidence: American Trust in the Military”. In Kohn and Feaver, *Uncertain Guardians*. (reserve)
 - Cook and Gronke, “Disdaining the Media? Americans Confidence in the Press, 1970–2000.” Working paper (reserve)
 - Current readings (from Gallup, NY Times, etc)
19. April 23–April 25 *What Causes Mistrust?*
- Hibbing and Theiss Morse, Part 3
 - Brehm and Rahn. “Individual Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 41(3, 1997): 999-1024. (JSTOR)
 - 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
 - Mutz and Flemming. “How Good People Make Bad Collectives: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Public Attitudes Towards Congress.” In Cooper, *Congress and the Decline of Public Trust*. (book on reserve)
20. Undated, if we have time *A Scattering of Controversial Topics and Summary Comments*
- Discrimination Against AIDS Patients? Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock. Ch. 3.
 - Abortion Extremists? Luker. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Selections on reserve.