Public Opinion and Voting Behavior

This course title is misleadingly narrow. Yes, we shall read and talk a great deal about public opinion and voting behavior. But we shall also read and talk about other aspects of mass politics: political participation, political communication, and political psychology.

Despite serving as the mass politics “core course” for the American Politics field, the course is also nearly as much Comparative as American. In the portions devoted to political psychology, it is both and neither. The domain is thematically, not geographically, defined. Our concern is with mass politics—and with its similarities and differences across contexts. There is plenty of latitude for both Americanists and Comparativists to focus on their particular interests. I welcome weekly essays and term papers (see below) on the U.S., given other countries, or sets of countries.

Note, by the way, that the topic on discussion, deliberation, and their effects intersects the political theory literature on “deliberative democracy” and the empirical literature on Deliberative Polling. We shall read about and discuss the Deliberative Polling project. There may be some possibility of using Deliberative Polling data for papers.

Prerequisites

There are no specific prerequisites. It is not important to have taken any previous course in American or Comparative Politics, nor to have taken graduate methods courses (although I do encourage you, for your general benefit, to do so). First-year students are specifically welcome, and have usually done well in similar courses.

Format

The course is a seminar, and students should come prepared to participate. I shall assign a grade for class participation, based on attendance and the quantity and quality of contributions to the discussion.

Texts


Outline and Readings

I Orientation (January 14)*

II Cognitive Engagement in Politics, Part I: What Are we Talking about, and Who Has How Much of It? (January 21)


**III Cognitive Engagement in Politics, Part II: What Difference (if Any) Does It Make? (January 21)**


Bartels, chap. xx.


IV Misinformation (January 28)

Mooney, entire.


Kull, Stephen, Ramsay, C., and E. Lewis. 2003. Misperceptions, the media, and the Iraq


### IV Education and Cognitive Ability (February 4)


V Public Opinion (February 11)

Bartels, entire (excepting chap. xx)


American Political Science Review Vol. 105, No. 3 August 2011
doi:10.1017/S0003055411000165

**Elite Influence on Public Opinion in an Informed Electorate**

JOHN G. BULLOCK

496-515.

### VI Partisanship and Polarization (February 18)


Gelman, Ernesti.


**VII Values and Ideology (February 25)**

Ellis and Stimson, entire.


VIII Cognition, Perception, and Reasoning (March 4)


Kahneman, entire.


IX Attitudes, Emotions, and Automaticity (March 11)


X  **Media Effects (March 18)**


Gerstlé and François.


**XI Discussion, Deliberation and Their Effects (March 25)**


XII Participation (April 1)

Franklin, entire.

Thomassen, ch. 3.


XIII Vote Choice, Part I (April 8)

Thomassen, chs. 1-2, 4-10.


Huber, Gregory A., Seth J. Hill, and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2012. Sources of Bias in


**XIV Vote Choice, Part II (April 15)**


(April 22) Personality and Culture

Nisbett, entire.


American Political Science Review Vol. 104, No. 1 February 2010
doi:10.1017/S0003055410000031
Personality and Political Attitudes: Relationships across Issue Domains and Political Contexts
ALAN S. GERBER, GREGORY A. HUBER, DAVID DOHERTY, and CONOR M. DOWLING Yale University
SHANG E. HA
111-133.

Personality Traits and Participation in Political Processes
Alan S. Gerber Yale University
Gregory A. Huber Yale University
David Doherty Loyola University Chicago
Conor M. Dowling Yale University
Connor Raso Stanford University
Shang E. Ha
692-706.

(April 29)


Assignments and Evaluation

Class Participation. The course is a seminar, and you should come prepared to participate. I shall assign a grade for class participation, based on your attendance and the quantity and quality of your contributions to the discussion.

Short Essays. These are weekly essays, of one to two single-spaced typed pages apiece, based on the week's readings and—NB—culminating in a question suitable for class discussion. The questions and their preambles should express some interesting criticism, extrapolation, speculation, or juxtaposition. They may be genuinely interrogatory, but may as usefully be rhetorical or argumentative. Among other possibilities, you may wish to call attention to internal contradictions within given readings or to inconsistencies between them, challenge the adequacy of some key measurement, question whether key results really sustain the interpretations they have been given, indicate ways in which results may not generalize to other settings or circumstances, point to variables that may have been omitted or causal processes that may have been misspecified, or suggest ways in which given arguments or results have implications for other, perhaps broader questions. The ideal question might be the germ of an eventual paper or perhaps even a dissertation. The essays should be submitted as emailed Word attachments, due in my email inbox by 10:00 a.m. each class day. The penalty for lateness is 5 points (on the
customary 100-point scale) per day.

One set of written assignments will be a weekly short essay of 1-2 single-spaced typed pages about the week's readings. *The essay should culminate in a question suitable for class discussion.* In addition, there will be a term paper, which should be empirically oriented, offering at minimum a detailed research design and preferably some analysis. Students may consult with me about their choice of topic and data and about other questions relating to their papers as necessary. Ad hoc tutoring in the rudiments of software and statistics—enough to do and interpret some simple analyses—will be provided as needed. The short essays will count for 40% combined, class participation for 15%, and the paper for 45%. (The first week’s essay will count toward your grade only if it helps your average.)

**Paper.** Students will also write a term paper, which can be either conceptual or empirical (but, if empirical, need not be statistically imposing). Your topic may concern the U.S., specific other countries, comparisons across countries, or general psychological mechanisms, as suits your interests. Those writing empirical papers will presumably draw on one or more archived datasets available from the ICPSR or other archives around the world, available online. You may consult with me about your choice of topic and data and about other questions relating to your paper as necessary. The papers should be submitted, again as emailed Word attachments, by midnight of Friday, December 3. Late papers will be penalized 3 points on the customary 100-point scale per twenty-four hours. By the same deadline, you should also provide to all other seminar members.

**Final Grade.** The short essays will count for 40% combined, class participation for 20%, and the paper for 40%.