PS108: Public Opinion and US Democracy (Also CVS138)
Last updated 12/8/23

Main information:
Spring 2024

Professor: *Teaching Assistant*:
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Class meets: BLOCK H+: Tues. and Thurs., 1:30pm-2:45pm, Terrace Room, Paige Hall

Office hours:
Mondays, 1:30-3:30pm (in person, though we can have a Zoom meeting if that works better). Book office hours at https://calendly.com/deborahschildkraut. Once you sign up for a meeting, you will get a confirmation email with a link you can use to change or cancel the appointment. Email me to set up appointments for other times.

Meetings with our TA are by appointment.

Course description:
This course addresses the impact of public opinion in the United States on the political process and vice versa. Our emphasis is on the linkage between American citizens and the democratic process. We will examine what public opinion is and engage in debates about how it can be measured. Topics include the nature of attitude formation, stability and change; the role of the media in opinion-formation; the link between attitudes and behavior; group differences in opinions; how elites influence mass opinions; political inequality; polarization; and the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes. We will also discuss congressional and presidential elections. These themes will allow us to consider a broad set of concerns about links between American citizens and the democratic process. In addition, you will become critical consumers of opinion data through the analysis of surveys and by learning about the polling process.

Prerequisite: Any PS foundation course or first year tutorial (PS2, 4 11, 21, 41, 42, or 61). This course fulfills the Political Science Department's methodology requirement.

Course format and requirements:
Class meets twice per week in either a lecture or workshop format. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss issues raised in the readings. If you miss class: (1) let me or our TA know, (2) see slides posted on Canvas, and (3) seek notes from a classmate. Then see me if you want to go over the missed material. ***Do NOT come to class if you feel sick***.

> View the **syllabus** to see what is assigned and planned for each day.
> View the relevant **Canvas** module to access the materials for that day.

I expect you to have read the assignments *before class* on the date they are listed and to have something to say about them. For weeks in which there is more than one reading listed, please read the items in the order in which they appear on the syllabus.

I strongly encourage you to follow current events and to read a national newspaper several times per week. I will be relying on current political issues and events for illustration, and I welcome your examples and observations in this regard.

Required Readings:

The following books are required reading for the course. They are on sale at the bookstore and on reserve in the library:

1. Erikson, Robert and Kent Tedin. 2023. *American Public Opinion*, 11th edition. Routledge. (ET) also available as an ebook.
2. Berinsky, Adam, editor. 2020. *New Directions in Public Opinion*, 3rd edition. Routledge. (NDPO)

There are additional required readings posted on CANVAS. Each week has its own module with the readings and related materials for each day.

SKIM: Occasionally, you are asked to **skim** a reading. "**Skim**" means you should be able to discuss the main idea of the reading, but you will not be held responsible for specific details.

PRIORITIZE: There may be times where it feels like there is too much reading. To make it more manageable, prioritize the readings that seem most interesting to you or that seem most difficult and you think you may need help making sense of it. For the other readings, be sure you know the main topics, findings, and arguments so you know that you can go to them when you want information on the topics they contain. At no point in the semester will I require you to memorize material from the reading nor will I quiz you on random details; you will have all readings at your disposal for all assignments. Knowing what's in them will help you use your time efficiently on exams and when working on projects.

Course website:

If you are already registered for this class, you should have access to the course website on CANVAS. There, you will find the syllabus, weekly modules, readings, and other resources you may find useful as you work on assignments. I will use CANVAS to send emails to the class regarding announcements and possible syllabus changes or updates, and you will be required to use CANVAS to complete assignments. CANVAS automatically uses your "tufts.edu" email address; if this is not your preferred email address, then you must make sure that emails sent to you through CANVAS are forwarded to the appropriate location. It is your responsibility to make sure that you receive *and read* class emails.

If you have trouble with CANVAS, see me or request help at canvas@tufts.edu. Technology help for students is available at: https://it.tufts.edu/technology-students.

<u>Note</u>: if you click on a link for a reading and it doesn't open, try clicking where it says to open the file in a new window (near the top of the page).

Important Dates:

Tu, 2/6:   Discussion of Media Poll Critiques
Tu, 2/13:   Media Poll Critique due in class
Th, 2/22:   Monday schedule: NO CLASS
Tu, 2/27:   Exam 1 due

Tu, 3/19   Spring break: NO CLASS
Th, 3/21:   Spring break: NO CLASS
Tu, 3/26:   One paragraph description of paper topic due

Th, 4/18:   Exam 2 due
Tu, 4/23:   Prospectus due
Fr, 4/26:   Post reflection on peer review session
Fr, 5/3:   Final projects due by 12pm

Assignments and Grading:

Asynchronous participation: 10%
Media Poll Critique: 20%
Take home Exam 1:   20%
Take home Exam 2:   20%
Final project prospectus: 5%
Final project: 25%

All assignments except asynchronous participation are graded out of 100 points. I take off 5 points for every day that an assignment is late. The asynchronous participation grade is simply a tally of the completed assignments. I convert numbers to letters in the following manner:
97 – 100 = A+; 94 – 96 = A; 90 – 93 = A-; 87 – 89 = B+; 84 – 86 = B; 80 – 83 = B-; 77 – 79 = C+; 74 – 76 = C; 70 – 73 = C-; 65 – 70 = D; Below 65 = F

Asynchronous participation (10% of course grade):

Most weeks, you are asked to engage in some short asynchronous online activity to be completed by the start of class on the day indicated on the syllabus. Normally, this engagement is in the form of a content reaction. These reactions can be questions you would like addressed, critiques of readings, connections to current events, or ideas for further research. They can also be questions that came to you during class, critiques of scholarship discussed in lecture, or responses to comments from classmates. Sometimes the weekly engagement will ask you to post questions for an upcoming guest speaker. You will find the link to the week's assignment in the module for that week. A guide to writing effective content reactions is on CANVAS under the Module for Week 2. Your grade is the percentage of assignments that you have completed on time.

Media Poll Critique (20% of course grade):

Fifteen percent of your course grade is based on your critique of a written account <u>from a news outlet</u> of a recent public opinion poll. For this assignment, select an article from a <u>news</u> source <u>in the past year</u> in which results from a public opinion poll are the main focus. You can select articles from print or online. You can choose from newspapers, magazines, or journalist blogs. You can also use a post from the website of a television news show (i.e., from cbsnews.com), but you should <u>not</u> be critiquing video (i.e. do not critique a segment from *NBC Nightly News*). And you should not use thinktank reports or press releases. ***DO NOT*** use a pre-election horserace poll (i.e. % intending to vote for Haley vs. Trump); the poll should be about issues.

Your critique should discuss the topic of the article and the context in which the article appeared (i.e. why would the news outlet cover this topic at this time?). Next, you should summarize the portrait of public opinion that the article conveys. Then you should assess the quality of the presentation of the results. What, if any, aspects of public opinion did the news outlet cover well? What aspects of the analysis were deficient? How, if at all, could coverage of the information be improved? How, if at all, could the poll itself have been improved? Do you think the media coverage was sufficient to allow the reader to be a critical consumer of the information? Our reading by Herbert Asher will be extremely useful as you work on this assignment.

If you choose a print article, include a scan of the article with your critique. If you choose a web-based source, include the URL. If the website has links to additional information about the poll, you do *not* need to supply those additional links; it is sufficient to discuss the content of those associated files in your paper.

Tips: Use subheadings; include a proper introduction and conclusion; proofread; invoke course materials in order to substantiate your critiques and suggestions.

Your critique should be roughly 5 – 7 pages, or about 1,500 to 2,000 words (numbered, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). This assignment should be uploaded to Canvas by the start of class on **February 13**. Late papers will have points deducted. On **February 6**, we will meet in small groups to discuss your critiques. Come to class that day prepared to talk in detail about your critique. Examples of successful media poll critiques from previous semesters are available on CANVAS.

Final project (30% of course grade):

Thirty percent of your course grade is based on your work for a final project. <u>You have a choice of whether the final project will be a recorded presentation or a paper</u>. If you choose a paper, the papers should be about 10-12 pages, or about 3,000 to 4,000 words (numbered, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). If you choose the recorded presentation, it should be 10-15 minutes long. The project is worth 25% of your course grade. The prospectus is worth 5% of your course grade. For your topic, you may choose from among the three options below.

1. Write a memo to either a current elected official or to a potential candidate for office (focusing on potential Senators, governors, or presidential candidates). Your memo should consist of either (a)

advice about which direction to pursue on a policy area of your choice or (b) advice about how to campaign with respect to particular issues and/or groups (i.e., how to court Latinx voters). For this topic, you are expected to combine information about current trends in public opinion with scholarly insights about the issues and/or groups you choose. You should explain what the relevant constituency wants, whether the politician should heed those wishes, and how best to sell his or her view to the public. Make sure you refer to course materials <u>as well as to outside scholarly sources</u> to explain why the public seems to have the views it does, why you think their views will or will not affect their votes, and why your advice on how to proceed should be followed.

2. Use the project as an opportunity to educate yourself about a topic not covered in our syllabus. Pick a topic in public opinion that you find interesting or puzzling and write a paper that reviews existing research on the topic. Explain why you chose the topic and what the current state of scholarly knowledge is. What do we know about opinions on this topic? What explains attitudes on this topic? What are the academic debates about public opinion in this arena? What do we still need to learn? Examples include: Do political campaigns matter, or are presidential elections really just determined by the state of the economy? How much does campaign spending affect public opinion during elections? How big of a problem is panel conditioning in on-line survey panels? Under what conditions are negative ads valuable? What shapes how Americans feel about foreign affairs? How much do Supreme Court decisions affect public opinion?

3. Conduct a public opinion autobiography. Explain how your own political outlook does or does not conform to expectations <u>established in public opinion research</u>. You do not need to address everything we have covered in class; instead, pick about 3 topics we have covered (socialization, race, class, gender, the media, citizen competence, etc.). Discuss the state of scholarly research on those topics (using course materials <u>and outside sources</u>) and compare scholarly expectations to your own opinion-formation process. If you think you deviate from the established literature (i.e. if you have a different partisan identification from your parents), discuss the potential reason(s) why.

More information about this assignment will be distributed in class in early March. A one-paragraph description of your topic is due in class on ***<u>March 26.</u>*** A 3-page (minimum) prospectus is due at the start of class on ***<u>April 23.</u>*** The prospectus should include:
    o   Whether you plan to write a paper or submit a presentation
    o   A description of your paper topic and research strategy
    o   An outline of the paper
    o   A list of the sources you have consulted to date

On ***April 23,*** you are also expected to share copies of your prospectus with the students in your peer review group. On our last class session, students will meet in assigned groups to critique each other's ideas. You will then be asked to post information on Canvas, seen only by me, about the information you received during your feedback session. That post is due by 1:30pm on **Friday, April 26**.

I strongly encourage you to meet with me or our TA at least once to discuss your project. The project is due at 12pm on ***<u>Friday, May 3.</u>***

An example successful research projects for this class are available for you to see on CANVAS.

Tufts policy on sharing course information:

It is against Tufts policy for anyone to share any content made available in this course including course syllabi, reading materials, powerpoint slides, videos, handouts, and exams with anyone outside of the course without the express permission of the instructor. This especially includes any posting or sharing of videos or other recordings on publicly accessible websites or forums. Any such sharing or posting could violate copyright law or law that protects the privacy of student educational records.

Extensions on assignments:

While it is best to avoid extensions and having material pile up, please know you can ask for extensions on assignments. If you ask, please ask as far in advance as possible and suggest an alternate due date. Indicate how much additional time you think you will need, and we'll go from there.

Office hours:

Office hours are a chance for you to talk with me about your coursework, the PS major, your thoughts on life after Tufts, or pretty much anything else. Office hours are by appointment at https://calendly.com/deborahschildkraut. **Office hours are my preferred way to meet with you**, but if the available times conflict with your schedule, send an email and we will find another time. Even if you don't have particular questions or concerns, it's a good idea to meet with your professors during office hours to help them get to know you.

Academic integrity:

Assignments you submit for this course will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs if any evidence of academic dishonesty is detected. When in doubt, cite! Tufts Academic Integrity Resources can be found here: https://students.tufts.edu/community-standards/support-resources/academic-integrity-resources.

Academic Support and Accessibility Services at the StAAR Center:

The StAAR Center offers a variety of resources to all students, and services are free to all enrolled students. You can make an appointment to work on any writing-related project or assignment, attend subject tutoring, or meet with an academic coach to hone fundamental academic skills like time management or overcoming procrastination. You can make an appointment by visiting go.tufts.edu/TutorFinder, or by visiting https://students.tufts.edu/staar-center. You also take a self-assessment quiz to identify your work and study habits and connect with relevant resources. The StAAR Center is also where you should go to register for academic accommodations.

AI Technology:

- Submitting work generated by AI technology without attribution is considered a form of plagiarism.
- When submitting work, **any portion of your work where you used AI technology at any stage for any reason requires citation**, even if you are not adopting AI text verbatim.
- Assume that all facts and sources provided by AI technology are false; verify and cite the sources you used to verify.

- In an AI citation, provide (1) the prompt you used, (2) the name of the AI tool and, if available, the version, (3) the company that provides the tool, (3) the date you used it, and (4) the AI url. Note that the AI tool is NOT an author.
- Example from the Modern Language Association:
  "Describe the symbolism of the green light in the book *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald" prompt. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

Register to vote:
If you are eligible and aren't registered to vote, you can register here:
https://tufts.turbovote.org/register.

Topics and Readings:
Week 1:
Th, Jan. 18: Introduction
***complete PS108 Spring 2024 Student Information Survey on CANVAS (not anonymous)
***complete a separate anonymous PS108 Survey posted on CANVAS.

Week 2:
Tu, Jan. 23: What is public opinion, and what role should it play?
Readings:
- PS108 syllabus (all of it)
- Writing Content Reactions
- Guide for Class Discussion
- Key, V.O. 1961. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. pp. 3-17.
  - Introduction to a classic text in the study of public opinion.
- ET: pp. 1-8
- Herbst, Susan. "The History and Meaning of Public Opinion."

Thu, Jan. 25: Measuring opinions:
Readings:
- ET: pp. 9-15; skim 16-18.
- NDPO: Hillygus, Sunshine. "The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges."
- Blumenthal, Mark and Natalie Jackson. "The 'Margin of Error' Is More Controversial Than You Think," *HuffPost Pollster*, 2/3/15.
- Andrew Fischer, "Polls Were Great in 2022. Can They Repeat Their Success in 2024?" *New York Times*. 7/12/23.
- American Association of Public Opinion Research. 2021. *Task Force on 2020 Pre-Election Polling: An Evaluation of the 2020 General Election Polls; Executive Summary*
- **Post content reaction**

Week 3:
Tu, Jan. 30: <u>Interpreting tables, graphs, and experiments</u>:
Readings:
- ET: pp. 24-51
- Hoover, Kenneth and Todd Donovan. 2008. *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*. pp. 16-29; 67-69; 85-100; 106-110.
- Wheelan, Charles. 2013. *Naked Statistics*. pp. 189-198.
- Druckman, James, et al. "Experiments: An Introduction to Core Concepts," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. <u>pp. 15-20 only</u>.

Thu, Feb. 1: <u>Debates about citizen competence</u>:
Readings:
- NDPO: Gilens, Martin. "Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance." (<u>only read to p. 58</u>)
- Asher, Herbert. 2016. *Polling and the Public*. 9th edition. <u>Note</u>: This reading will be useful for your media poll critique.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 4:
Tu, Feb. 6<u>: Small group discussion of Media Poll Critiques</u>
- No additional reading

Thu, Feb. 8: <u>Partisan Identification and Ideology</u>:
Readings:
- NDPO: Federico, Christopher. "Ideology and Public Opinion." (<u>only read to p. 88</u>)
- ET: pp. 70-87
- Klar, Samara and Yanna Krupnikov. 2016. *Independent Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
    - Pp. 1-11, 15-23, 38-43, 96-100, 112-114.
    - Sections from a book on why people act like partisans but call themselves "independent."
- **SKIM**: Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. "Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 782-799.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 5:
Tu, Feb. 13: <u>Partisan identification and ideology continued</u>:
Readings:
- Jefferson, Hakeem. "The Curious Case of Black Conservatives: Assessing the Validity of the Liberal-Conservative Scale among Black Americans." Forthcoming, *Public Opinion Quarterly*.
    - Come to class prepared to discuss in small groups the methods and findings in this article.
Media Poll Critique Due by 1:30pm

Thu, Feb. 15: <u>Polarization: Issues and Affect</u>:
Readings:

- Alan Abramowitz. 2022. "The Polarized American Electorate: The Rise of Partisan-Ideological Consistency and Its Consequences," Political Science Quarterly. 137: 645-674.
- NDPO: Shanto Iyengar. "Affective Polarization or Hostility Across the Partisan Divide: An Overview."
- Yanna Krupnikov and John Barry Ryan. 2020. "The Read Divide in American is Between Political Junkies and Everyone Else." *New York Times*. 10/20/20.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 6:
Tu, Feb. 20: <u>Political Knowledge</u>:
Readings:

- ET: skim pp. 62-64
- NDPO: Jennifer Jerit. "How People Learn About Politics: Navigating the Information Environment."
- Cohen, Cathy J., and Matthew D. Luttig. "Reconceptualizing political knowledge: Race, ethnicity, and carceral violence." *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 3 (2020). <u>ONLY READ pp. 805-809 and 812-816</u>.
- Dolan, Kathleen, and Michael A. Hansen. "The variable nature of the gender gap in political knowledge." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41, no. 2 (2020): 127-143.
- **Exam 1 posted today**

Thu, Feb. 22: No class: MONDAY SCHEDULE

Week 7:
Tu, Feb. 27: Make up day/talk about final project
EXAM 1 DUE by 1:30pm

Th, Feb. 29: Guest speaker: Dana Popky, Associate Panel Manager at Pew Research Center and Tufts alum, class of 2020.
Reading:

- Kennedy, Courtney, Dana Popky, and Scott Keeter. 2023. "How Public Polling Has Changed in the 21st Century." Pew Research Center.
- Post question for Dana Popky

Week 8:
Th, March 5: <u>Groups: Membership, Identification, Interests, and Consciousness</u>
Readings:

- NDPO: Erica Czaja and Vladimir Mendenica. "Race, Ethnicity, and Public Opinion."

Th, March 7: <u>Racial attitudes and racial politics</u>
Readings:

- ET: pp. 194-200
- NDPO: Michael Tesler. "Racial Attitudes and American Politics."
- Jennifer Chudy and Hakeem Jefferson, 2021. "Support for Black Lives Matter Surged Last Year: Did It Last?" *New York Times*.
- Chryl Laird and Ismail White. 2020. "Why So Many Black Voters Are Democrats, Even When They Aren't Liberal." FiveThirtyEight.com.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 9:
Tu, March 12: Current research on Latinx public opinion
Readings:
- Hickel Jr, Flavio R., Rudy Alamillo, Kassra AR Oskooii, and Loren Collingwood. "The role of identity prioritization: Why some Latinx support restrictionist immigration policies and candidates." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2020): 860-891.
- Rakich, Nathaniel, and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux. 2020. "There's no such thing as the 'Latino vote." Fivethirtyeight.com.
- Alex Samuels. 2022. "Why the GOP might not turn off conservative Latino voters." Fivethirtyeight.com.

Th, March 14: Workshop on Asian American public opinion
Readings:
- Chan, Nathan, Joyce H. Nguy, and Natalie Masuoka. "The Asian American vote in 2020: Indicators of turnout and vote choice." *Political Behavior* (2022): 1-25.

Week 10:
Spring break: No class March 19 or 21

Week 11:
Tu, March 26: Research on gender and public opinion
Readings:
- ET: pp. 213-217.
- Ondercin, Heather L. "Marching to the Ballot Box: Sex and Voting in the 2020 Election Cycle." In *The Forum*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 559-580. De Gruyter, 2021.
- NDPO: Donald Kinder, Molly Reynolds, and Nancy Burns. "Categorical Politics in Action: Gender and the 2016 Presidential Election."
- **Optional**: Bos, Angela L., Jill S. Greenlee, Mirya R. Holman, Zoe M. Oxley, and J. Celeste Lay. "This one's for the boys: How gendered political socialization limits girls' political ambition and interest." *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 2 (2022): 484-501.
- **One paragraph description of paper topic due today**

Th, March 28: <u>Do campaigns matter</u>?

Readings:

- NDPO: John Sides and Jake Haselwerdt. "Campaigns and Elections."
- ET: pp. 257-664; 273-281.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. "It's the pandemic, stupid! a simplified model for forecasting the 2020 presidential election." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54, no. 1 (2021): 52-54.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 12:

Tu, April 2: <u>Congressional Campaigns</u>:

Readings:

- Jacobson, Gary C. "The 2022 Elections: A Test of Democracy's Resilience and the Referendum Theory of Midterms." *Political Science Quarterly* 138, no. 1 (2023): 1-22.

Th, April 4: <u>Media</u>:

Readings:

- ET: pp. 221-230; 236-243; 251-254.
- Dunaway, Johanna and Kathleen Searles. 2023. *News and Democratic Citizens in the Mobile Era*. Pp. 1-12, 20-34, and 90-93.
- **Post content reaction**

Week 13:

Tu, April 9: <u>Values, tolerance, and democratic stability</u>:

Readings:

- ET: pp. 158-166; 169-173
- James L. Gibson, Christopher Claassen, and Joan Barceló. 2020. "Putting Groups Back Into the Study of Political Intolerance," in At the Forefront of Political Psychology, edited by Eugene Borgida, Christopher Federico, and Joanne Miller. **ONLY READ pp 55-66 and 71-73**.
- **SKIM**: "Free Expression in America Post-2020," report from the Knight Foundation, 2022.

Th, April 11: <u>Workshop on democracy in crisis</u>:

Readings:

- Bright Line Watch. "Unchartered Territory: The Aftermath of Presidential Indictments." July 2023.
  - Report from a group of political scientists who have surveyed both exports and the American public on issues relating to democratic stability and backsliding since 2017.
  - Read the full report, including the appendix and additional tables.

Exam 2 posted

Week 14:

Tu, April 16: <u>Elite and mass linkages</u>:
Readings:
- ET: pp. 284-288; 298-304; 308-312; 316-321.
- NDPO: Gilens. P58 to end.
- Lilliana Mason and Nathan Kalmoe. 2022. "Why it might help that some Republicans deny political violence is 'legitmate'". *Washington Post*.

Th, April 18: Make up day
Exam 2 due

Week 15:

Tu, April 23: Guest speaker: Allison Anoll, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Vanderbilt University.
Reading:
- Anoll, Allison, Andrew Engelhardt, and Mackenzie Israel-Trummel. 2023. "From Protest to Child-Rearing: How Movement Politics Shape Socialization Priorities."
- **Post question for Professor Anoll**
- **Prospectus due**

Th, April 25: Peer review groups

Fr, April 26: Post reflection of peer review session on CANVAS by 1:30pm

Fr, May 3: Final projects due by 12pm.