Political Science 333: Political Socialization and Public Opinion
Monday/Wednesday 8:30-9:50PM
304 Bessey Hall

Instructor: Prof. Corwin D. Smidt
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Office Hours: Tuesday 10AM-12PM
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Course Description

In their purest form, democratic governments and policies purport to reflect “the will of the people.” But what exactly is the “will of the people?” Who are “the people?” How do we observe and measure it? How do different forms of popular participation and expressing opinion shape our concepts of popular consent? What is the current state of public opinion? How do our cultural, economic, or our immediate political environments inform or influence it? Does public opinion matter? These are the questions we seek to answer in this course.

The goal of this class is two-fold:

1. For each student to become a discerning consumer of public opinion evidence, especially in regards to its common uses (and misuses) within normative and empirical arguments about politics and public policy.

2. For each student to possess a sufficient body of knowledge about the nature and influence of mass public opinion and popular preferences in advanced democracies.

Course Materials

These should be available at student bookstores; Amazon or Barnes and Noble also have them online. All of these have paperback editions.


**Online Materials:** Additional required readings and resources will be assigned as noted on the syllabus. These readings will be available either through university-subscribed services (like JSTOR) or through the D2L course website as noted.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Your final grade will be calculated from the following components:

**Quizzes and Written Responses:** 25 percent. Quizzes and written responses will assess your attention and interaction with the day’s assigned reading material or class discussion. Quizzes will be given in class (no makeups). Written responses require you to discuss or respond to a question using class material and will be assigned at the end of class and be due within the next week. You will have at least 10 quiz or written response opportunities (likely more), of which only your top 8 grades will be used to calculate your grade.

**Lab Assignments:** 10 percent. You need to complete two lab assignments requiring you to analyze public opinion data using online resources and databases. The first lab will have you examine how young peoples’ attitudes have changed from the 1970s to today. The second lab will have you examine various attitude determinants of voting. Assignments will be made available online. Due dates are noted in the syllabus.

**Midterm and Final Examinations:** 65 Percent. Examinations will evaluate your knowledge of both book material and material discussed in class. In other words, you need to come to class to perform well on examinations. Two midterms and a comprehensive final will be used to assess your knowledge of course material. From these three examinations, your two best grades will be used to formulate your grade. As a result, you need to take at least two exams to receive all possible points. You cannot “make up” an examination; if you miss a midterm exam you automatically receive a zero and your grade from the final examination will used to calculate your overall grade. If the comprehensive final is counted as part of your grade, it will count for 35% of your total grade. If the two midterms are your two best grades, then I will weight the two grades equally.

**Grading Scale:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-89</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>88-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>68-65</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<td>≤64</td>
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**Class Schedule**

The schedule and reading assignments listed below are expectations; they are always open to change as additional readings may also be assigned. Chapters and pages are for the most
recent edition of each book, with those from the prior edition listed in parentheses if different. Content from optional readings will be summarized and discussed in class; if you miss class, then you may want to read them.

Jan 12 Course Introduction and Details

Jan 14 Democratic Theory and Public Opinion

- Dalton pages 1-21 (1-18)

Jan 19 No Class: MLK JR. Day

I. DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

Jan 21 What is (or should be) Public Opinion? Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 1

Jan 26, 28 Participatory aspects of public opinion: voting, protest, and other forms of civic participation. Read:

- Dalton Chapters 3 & 4

Feb 2, 4 Polls as a measure of public opinion. Read:
II. HOW PUBLIC OPINION IS ORGANIZED AND HOW IT OPERATES

Feb 9. 11 Political Knowledge and Ideological Sophistication. Read:

- Dalton pages 21-36 (18-31)
- Erikson & Tedin pages 55-80 (57-83)

Feb 16 Partisanship. Read:

- Dalton Chapter 9
- Erikson & Tedin the rest of Chapter 3

Feb 18 Dynamics and Behavior of Aggregate Opinion. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin: Chapter 4 and “Who Are the Floating Voters?” pages 254-257 (264-267)

III. SOURCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

Feb 23 Political Socialization. Read:

- Erikson & Tedin Chapter 5


Feb 25, Mar 2 Democratic Values and Evaluations of Democracy. Read:

• Erikson & Tedin Chapter 6

• Dalton Chapters 5 (and 11, optional)


Mar 4 First Midterm Exam: covering all material through political socialization.

Mar 9, 11 No Class: Spring Break

Mar 16 “How much do we differ?” Group Differences in Opinion: Class, Gender, and Race. Read:

• Erikson & Tedin Chapter 7

• Dalton Chapter 8

Mar 18 “How much do we differ?” Public Opinion, Culture Wars, and Inequality - An Introductory Discussion. Read:

• Bartels Chapters 1 & 2


• First Lab Assignment Due on the 18th

Mar 23 “How much do we differ?” Group Differences and Public Opinion: Religion and Income. Read:

• Bartels Chapter 3

Mar 25, 30 Identifications, Retrospective Evaluations, and Voting. Read:

• Erikson & Tedin Chapter 9

• Dalton Chapters 10
• Bartels Chapter 4


**Apr 1** Comparing American public opinion with other countries. Read:

• Dalton Chapter 6


**Apr 6** Inequality & Egalitarianism Opinions in Practice. Read:

• Bartels Chapters 5-7

**Apr 8, 13, 15** News Media and Public Opinion. Read:

• Erikson & Tedin Chapter 8


• Second Lab Assignment Due on the 15th

**Apr 20, 22** Politicians, Polls, and Political Representation and Responsiveness. Read:

• Dalton Chapter 11

• Erikson & Tedin Chapters 11 & 12

• Bartels Chapters 8-10


**Apr 27** Second Midterm Exam: covering all material from democratic values and on.

**Apr 29** Wrap up, hand back second midterm, final review

**Final Comprehensive Examination** Monday, May 4; 7:45-9:45 AM; Covers all course material.
Class Policies

Missing Class and Late Work: Quizzes and exams cannot be made up if you miss class on that date. For other assignments, if you are unable to attend class, then it remains your responsibility to hand in any papers or assignment on the day it is due. Late work can be dropped off in my mailbox or emailed to me (please use .pdf format). Work that is not handed in by class-time is considered late. Late assignments will receive a 15% penalty if handed in before the next class, 30% if handed in two classes late, and no credit thereafter.

Academic Misconduct: Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Examples of misconduct include violating rules stated in this syllabus, cheating, plagiarism, and dishonesty. All of the work you hand in within this course is expected to be your own. Cheating or plagiarism will not to be tolerated. Instances of cheating will be handled according the school’s policy on integrity of scholarship and grades. For more information and a complete definition of academic misconduct see your student handbook’s General Student Regulation 1.00 at: [http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/](http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/).

Learning Needs: Any student who may need an accommodation because of any disability should contact MSU’s Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (http://rcpd.msu.edu/) at 130 Bessey Hall within the first two weeks to provide me with information for proper accommodation. If you have any questions please feel free to contact them or ask me, all information and documentation will be kept confidential.

Final Caveat: This course hopefully will not deviate from what is written above, but I reserve the right to modify anything within it as I see needed to improve your learning experience.