Course Description
In this seminar we will review and evaluate studies of mass public opinion and political behavior. A fundamental justification for electoral democracy is the legitimacy and value of popular sovereignty. By understanding how (and why) Americans think about politics and how they act on these thoughts we can begin to understand the constraints and freedoms of democratically elected governments, and (ultimately) the value and perils of popular sovereignty.

This seminar will not provide a survey of popular topics in the field. Even when limiting ourselves to American politics, the literature on public opinion, voting behavior, and political participation is too vast. Indeed, this task is much better accomplished by examining recent publications like the *Annual Review of Political Science* and the Oxford Handbook series on *Political Psychology, American Elections and Voting Behavior*, and *American Public Opinion and the Media*. Instead of skimming the surface of a various fields, my hope is to dive deeper into the foundations and assumptions of the field as a whole, focusing on theories and studies of lasting and broad relevance and prominent areas of current debate. We might also spend some time on what I believe to be ignored or future topics of importance.

Seminar Format, Requirements, and Grading
The seminar format will not differ much from others. You are expected to come to class having read all the required material and be familiar with the additional readings that relate to your interests. Participation in seminar discussions is a must. If you all talk less, then I will assign more required reading so we have more content to discuss.

Each week you will need to write a response to the readings and submit it prior to class. The syllabus outlines a number of questions that motivate the selection of the week's readings. Your response should engage these readings either by forming your own personal answer to a question (in reflection of the readings) or addressing a concern or related conclusion that came about from your reading. The response need not address all the readings, but stronger responses usually relate to more than one. The response should be typed and no more than 600 words. Be concise and comprehensive – i.e., edit. I intend to read the responses before seminar and incorporate them into discussion. They should either be emailed to me or placed in my mailbox before noon, prior to class.
You will also be required to submit two written papers. The first paper will be shorter and provide your thoughts and comments in reaction to the readings we cover in the first class's first month. The second paper will be due on exam week and needs to be either a research proposal paper or a critical review of the literature paper. More information will be given as exam week approaches.

Grading in this class follows typical graduate school conventions. A 4.0 represents very good work, a 3.5 represents adequate completion of the course, a 3.0 indicates less than adequate performance, and a 2.5 or lower indicates very poor performance.

**Note:** For your benefit, I do not favor giving out incompletes. I also do not accept late assignments.

**Course Outline**

* - marks required readings for the section. It is expected that you familiarize yourself with the content of some of the other listed readings. Electronic versions of most journals are available online through the library (http://er.lib.msu.edu). Blue font in this syllabus's electronic file represents hyperlinks to online versions of work from book chapters or other hard to find sources. All other required reading is available on the class Angel page.

**A: Foundational questions**

1. What is public opinion and mass political behavior? What is the purpose of studying it? Have these concepts changed? **Readings:**


2. The changing citizen, state, and public sphere: How have concepts of citizenship changed? How do American civic institution interact with these changes? How might they change? What opinions and behavior are currently or potentially political? **Readings:**

3. What should we study: attitudes, preferences, or behavior? Are attitudes or preferences consistent over time? Is behavior consistent with attitudes? What are valid or useful measurements: surveys, experiments, and/or election outcomes? Can academic surveys survive?


**First Paper Assignment** Define public opinion and what qualities of it require study for evaluations of American democracy and the prospect of popular sovereignty. Based on your thoughts, what does or does not make for a valuable study of public opinion and mass behavior?

**B: Dominant models of how we think and behave politically.**

1. **Political Participation:** Why do people participate? Have American political and social institutions become more or less amenable to civic engagement? What does this mean for representation?


2. Party Support, Performance, and Voting Behavior: Why do people support one party over the other? Is party support flexible or malleable? How does it reflect government performance?

3. Public Opinion Processes: How are political attitudes formed? How do they change? What are their consequences?


C: Topics of Current or Continuing Interest
Depending on progress, I will select the required readings the week before we discuss these in seminar.

1. Partisan Bias, Affect, & Motivated Reasoning:
- Erisen, Cengiz, Milton Lodge, and Charles S. Taber. Forthcoming. “Affective Contagion in Effortful Political Thinking” *Political Psychology*

2. Political Engagement, Knowledge, and Information:


3. Message (or Event) Effects: Media, Priming, Framing, and Agenda Setting


• Lens, Gabriel S. 2012. Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians’ Policies and Performance University of Chicago Press.


5. Students’ Choice: Identity Politics, Emotion, Democratic Values, Networks, Deliberation, Motivation, …

• Readings to be selected
Second Paper Assignment: Due exam week, either: 1) Research Proposal (details to follow) or 2) Critical Review – Evaluate our understanding of mass public opinion and political behavior using the evaluation criteria you developed in the first paper. To what extent are these works meaningful and/or valuable (where are the greatest contributions)? To what extent are they theoretical crutches hindering advancements or the development of more meaningful constructs? Where do you see the greatest potential for future contributions?

A Couple Last Things

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Specifically, claiming ownership of ideas and or work that is not your own is considered cheating or plagiarism. It is an insult to me, your peers, and yourself; it is not to be tolerated. Instances of cheating will be handled according the school’s policy on integrity of scholarship and grades.

Electronic Submissions

As a general rule, students should always submit their work in paper form. If, under special circumstances, you are submitting a document electronically, then you need to submit it in an archival format. This means no modifiable Word/Text documents (.doc, .txt, .rtf) and instead formats where content is fixed (.pdf, .ps).