

POL 351-P: Public Opinion

Time: Tu/Th 11:20am – 12:35pm

Location: Memorial 312/Zoom (follow Zoom Meetings link on Blackboard)

Instructor: Prof. Casey Klofstad

Office Hours: W 12:00pm – 1:00pm (ZOOM ID: 498-131-4048); or by appointment

Email: klofstad@gmail.com

Description

This course is an overview of public opinion in the United States in four parts: (1) what it is; (2) where it comes from; (3) how it influences our behavior; (4) the consequences of it for democratic governance. We will rely on classic and cutting-edge research as our guide to these topics.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By successfully completing this course students will develop a deeper understanding of...

- ...what public opinion is.
- ...the sources of our opinions.
- ...the influence that our opinions have on our behavior.
- ...the relationship between what the public wants and what it receives from government.
- ...the importance of the individual citizen in a representative democracy.

Modality

We are remote for the first two weeks of class. Unless UM says otherwise, please follow these rules:

- If we are remote, please use the “Zoom Meetings” link on Blackboard page to attend.
- If we are in-person the expectation is that you attend in person unless you are ill (no doctor note required, I trust your judgment and honesty).

UM COVID Policies for Classroom

Surgical masks or multi-layered, tightly woven cloth masks are required in all indoor public spaces, regardless of vaccination status. Food or drink are not allowed.

Learning Activities

Attendance, Readings, and Blackboard Quizzes: 20%

Attendance and completion of readings are required. You will complete a quiz on Blackboard after each class (due 11:59pm EST). The quizzes cover the reading and lecture. Your lowest four quiz scores will be dropped to account for misses and technology failures; “makeups” will not be offered.

Exam 1: 20% (Thursday, February 10)

Exam 1 will cover the Introduction and Part 1, including the readings and lectures. The format is 30 multiple choice questions. Make ups will only be given in extreme circumstances with prior consent.

Exam 2: 20% (Thursday, March 10)

Exam 2 is structured like the first and covers the material from Part 2.

Exam 3: 20% (Tuesday, April 12)

Exam 3 is structured like the others and covers the material from Part 3.

Exam 4: 20% (Thursday, May 5, 11:00am – 1:30pm)

Exam 4 is structured like the others and covers the material from Part 4.

Extra Credit

There are no options for extra credit.

Assessment

Grading Scale

All activities listed above, as well as your final grade in the course, will be graded on a scale of 0-to-100. Letter grades are assigned as follows:

- 96+ = A
- 88 - 95 = A-
- 79 - 87 = B+
- 72 - 78 = B
- 63 - 71 = B-
- 54 - 62 = C+
- 47 - 53 = C
- 38 - 46 = C-
- 29 - 37 = D+
- 22 - 28 = D

This scale is not a curve; you are competing with yourself, not your classmates. Letter grades are determined by converting the 0-to-100 scale to match the 4-point UM GPA letter grade scale.

Rounding of Final Grades

In calculation of your final letter grade the instructor will round up tenths of points of .5 or higher to the nearest whole number (e.g., a final grade of 95.5 would be rounded up to 96).

Accommodations

Accommodations must be arranged by the student in advance (camnercenter.miami.edu).

Academic Integrity

Please review UM's newly-revised policy here:

https://fs.miami.edu/_assets/pdf/facultysenate/Documents/academic-integrity-policy-final-changes-accepted.pdf

Cancellation

If a class is canceled, you are still responsible for completing the assigned work by its due date.

No Phones

Cell phones need to be silenced and placed in your bag or pocket.

No Recording

Students are prohibited from recording. Course meetings might be recorded by UM. Any recordings are available to students registered for this class to supplement the classroom experience. Students must maintain the security of passwords used to access recordings. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared, or uploaded online. If the Instructor or UM plans any other uses for the recordings, beyond this class, students identifiable in the recordings will be asked for their consent prior to use. Professor Klofstad is the copyright owner of the courseware.

Points of Contact with the Instructor

- Speak with me before or after class.
- Attend Zoom office hours.
- Send me an email.
- Meet with me outside of office hours; please email me days and times to choose from.

Required Texts

All readings are provided on the course Blackboard page. These readings are designed to give you deeper insight into the general topic of the day. Lectures will serve as a broader overview of the topic.

Well-Being Resources and Support

As you complete your coursework, consider how you can maintain your health and well-being as a top priority. To help you become familiar with the many programs and services available on campus, review the information collected on the Division of Student Affairs Student Well-Being and Resiliency website available at miami.edu/well-being. Please reach out to me or any of the resources listed on the site if you need assistance or support throughout the semester.

Class Schedule and Required Readings

Introduction

1 Tuesday, January 18: Why Opinion Matters [on Zoom]

- “Chapter 2: The bottom-up approach” (Newport)

2 Thursday, January 20: The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion [on Zoom]

- “How citizens acquire information and convert it into public opinion” (Zaller)

3 Tuesday, January 25: Measurement (guest: John Stevenson, Assoc. Dir., Univ. of WI Survey Center) [on Zoom]

- “Chapter 7: Behind the curtain: how polling is done” (Newport)
- “An evaluation of the 2020 general elections polls” (AAPOR)
- “Quantitative Data Analysis 101” (<https://youtu.be/EUeQRE5UJpg>)

Wednesday, January 26: Last Day to Add a Course

Part 1: What is It?

4 Thursday, January 27: Classical Liberalism [on Zoom]

- “Chapter IX: of the ends of political society and government” (Locke)
- The Declaration of Independence
- “American exceptionalism reconsidered: culture or institutions?” (Steinmo)

Monday, January 31: In-Person Classes Resume

5 Tuesday, February 1: Ideology and Partisanship

- “Affect and cognition in party identification” (Burden & Klofstad)
- “Political ideology” (Feldman)

Wednesday, February 2: Last Day to Drop a Course Without a W

6 Thursday, February 3: Engagement and Knowledge

- “Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education” (Galston)
- “Chapter 1: thinking about social change in America” (Putnam)

Tuesday, February 8: Zoom Review Session (ON ZOOM: follow the “Zoom” link on Blackboard)

Thursday, February 10: Exam 1

Part 2: Where Does It Come From?

7 Tuesday, February 15: You – Demography and Group Identities

- “In changing U.S. electorate, race and education remain stark dividing lines” (Pew)

8 Thursday, February 17: You – Psychology

- “Introduction: theoretical foundations of political psychology” (Huddy et al.)

9 Tuesday, February 22: You – Biology

- “Genetic foundations of political behavior” (Funk)

10 Thursday, February 24: Your Environment – Family and Friends

- “Networks, interdependence, and social influence in politics” (Huckfeldt et al.)

11 Tuesday, March 1: Your Environment – The Media

- “What’s a dog story worth?” (Atkinson et al.)

12 Thursday, March 3: Your Environment – Elites

- “Information, predisposition, and opinion” (Zaller)
- “How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation” (Druckman et al.)

Tuesday, March 8: Zoom Review Session (ON ZOOM: follow the “Zoom” link on Blackboard)

Thursday, March 10: Exam 2

Saturday, March 12 – Sunday, March 20: Spring Break

Part 3: How Does It Influence Us?

13 Tuesday, March 22: Voter Turnout

- Chapters 2 and 3 of *Who Votes Now?* (Leighley & Nagler) [eBook via UM’s library]

14 Thursday, March 24: Vote Choice

- “How voice pitch influences our choice of leaders” (Klofstad et al.)

15 Tuesday, March 29: Conspiratorial Thinking (guest: Prof. Joseph Uscinski, UM Political Science)

- “American politics in two dimensions” (Uscinski et al.)

16 Thursday, March 31: Non-Political Civic Participation

- “Chapter 3: civic participation” (Putnam)
- “Chapter 7: altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy” (Putnam)

17 Tuesday, April 5: Social Movements

- “The political process model” (McAdam)

Thursday, April 7: Zoom Review Session (ON ZOOM: follow the “Zoom” link on Blackboard)

Tuesday, April 12: Exam 3

Part 4: So What? — Opinion and Governance

18 Thursday, April 14: Influence of Opinion on Policy

- “Income inequality and policy responsiveness” (Erikson)
- “What Americans think about gun control” (Miller)
- “Testing inferences about American politics: a review of the ‘oligarchy’ result” (Bashir)

19 Tuesday, April 19: Influence of Policy on Opinion

- “Social policy and civic participation” (Campbell)
- “Introduction: what is wrong with the American political system?” (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse)

20 Thursday, April 21: An Increasingly Divided America?

- “Party polarization in American politics” (Layman et al.)
- “Political polarization in the American public” (Fiorina & Abrams)
- “The measurement of partisan sorting for 180 million voters” (Brown & Enos)

21 Tuesday, April 26: Voice, Equality, and the Better Angels of our Nature

- “The participatory process and the sources of representational distortion” (Verba et al.)
- “Political trust in a cynical age” (Citrin & Stoker)
- “When we stop talking politics” (Wells et al.)
- “Is deliberation an antidote to extreme partisan polarization?” (Fishkin et al.)
- Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address

Thursday, April 28: Zoom Review Session (ON ZOOM: follow the “Zoom” link on Blackboard)

Thursday, May 5, 11:00am – 1:30pm: Exam 4

References

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