

Political Science 503: Public Opinion

Joseph Lyons

Autumn Quarter, 2005

2168 Derby Hall

Tuesday, Thursday, 2:30 – 4:18

292-9499; lyons.180@osu.edu

0277 Caldwell Laboratory

Office hours: MW 1-3 p.m., by appointment

Course Description and Expectations

“Public opinion” is a term that is thrown around loosely nowadays, whether it be in an attempt to justify a particular course of action or to claim that the system is not working. Often, multiple claims of what the “public opinion” is saying will occur at once, spraying in all sorts of different directions. And yet the term obviously holds great importance in this society, in spite of its perhaps confusing nature.

What can we make of this? In order to understand the force that is public opinion, we must have a common understanding of what “public opinion” actually refers to. We must also know how such a thing can be measured, and we must also have an understanding of the process in which a public opinion is formed and altered.

These are amongst the goals of this course. As we proceed in the course, we will be examining the ways in which citizens express their political opinions, as well as why they appear to hold the opinions they do. We will also attempt to learn more about why attitudes and opinions may change over time or in response to certain events. The mass media’s role in the opinion formation and maintenance process will also be explored. Finally, we will put forth a look at what the *effects* of public opinion might be. How does public opinion affect elections? How might it affect public policy? How might politicians and elected officials seek to manipulate it?

As these are broad aims, understandably the reading may be a bit intense at times. I do ask, however, that you familiarize yourselves with the assigned readings before each class period, particularly regarding those topics which seem the most foreign to you.

There are **three** assigned texts for this course (additional reading assignments noted will be made available later), all of which may be purchased at SBX Bookstore:

American Public Opinion, 7th Edition, by Erikson and Tedin
Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know, 6th Edition, by Asher
Influence: Science and Practice, 4th Edition, by Cialdini

Course Requirements and Grading

We will be having one midterm examination and a final examination. The final will concentrate on the latter half of the course, although some questions will be included that touch upon topics from the beginning half. The format of the exams will be discussed in class.

Make-up exams will ONLY be allowed if you have discussed the matter with me BEFORE the exam AND if I have given my permission. Excuses given to me the day of the exam or afterwards will find me quite skeptical, and I will check all sources to verify them. Regardless, only in extreme cases will I grant makeup exams—for example, early or late flights ARE NOT acceptable reasons.

You will be assigned a 6-8 page essay as well. You will receive a more in-depth assignment sheet for this paper closer to its due date, and I encourage you to make an appointment to see me after you receive it. I'll be happy to help you with questions you may have. However, the closer you get to the due date, the less time I'll have to help you in your search, so please come to me as early as you can. I will look through rough drafts of your papers, if you like, but only if you get them to me NO LATER THAN one week before the due date (the papers are due on November 22; this means drafts may be submitted no later than November 15. Sorry, no exceptions.) Your papers will be graded for coherence and strength of argument. I will not dock you points for grammatical mistakes UNLESS they make your paper too difficult to read.

The breakdown of the grading is as follows:

Midterm Examination	35%
Final Examination	35%
Essay	30%

I will not be grading based on attendance and participation, at least strictly speaking. I believe that should you choose not to attend class, you will find it much more difficult to pass the exams, and in that sense attendance indirectly affects your grade. However, I will be granting extra credit for participation in the form of 10 in-class short quizzes. The quizzes will be unannounced, so it really would be a good idea to make it to every class just to make sure you catch all of them. Each quiz will be worth 2 possible points; you will earn one point if you get at least half of the answers on it correct, and you will receive two points if you get all of the answers on it correct. So, in all, there are 20 possible extra credit points in this course. That may not sound like much, but it could give as much as a 5% boost to your final grade—for example, it could possibly change a B- into a B+. I encourage you all to take advantage of this extra credit opportunity by keeping up with your readings and coming to every class.

One final thing about those extra credit quizzes—you have to come to class to be able to take them. I will allow ONLY ONE MAKEUP of one of these quizzes, and you will only be allowed to do so if you notify me of your absence BEFORE that day's class.

Academic Dishonesty

According to University Rule 3335-31-02, “Each instructor shall report to the committee on academic misconduct all instances of what he or she believes may be academic misconduct.” In other words, not only am I allowed to report such behavior, I am *required* to do so. I am a big believer in giving credit where credit is due, and so shall you be in this class. Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. When you acquire information from an outside source, you **MUST** document where you found it. Should I find something within your work that is improperly cited, you will be penalized. Should your effort be egregious enough, I will be compelled to contact the committee on academic misconduct.

Please write as much as possible of your work in your own words. Use proper citations when you use information obtained through an outside source. If you have any questions about how to properly cite your sources, please see me.

Above all, please do your own work. Cheating on exams and plagiarism on paper assignments will not be tolerated.

One more thing—papers found online at the various “essays for download” sites are easy enough for me to find, too. And even if one got by me, the papers you find online aren’t very good anyway, so using them is ill-advised.

Statement on Disability Services

(from *Teaching at The Ohio State University: A Handbook*) “Any student who feels he/she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.”

Please contact me with any needs you may have in this class. I want you to have the most efficient learning environment possible.

Sept. 22	Course introduction
Sept. 27, 29	The history of public opinion research <i>Public Opinion</i> , chapter 1. <i>Polling and the Public</i> , chapter 1
Oct. 4, Oct. 6	The scope and methods of public opinion research <i>Public Opinion</i> , chapter 2 <i>Polling and the Public</i> , chapters 3, 4, 5.

Oct. 11	<p>Sources of opinion: Social demographics <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 7</p>
Oct. 13, 18	<p>Sources of opinion: Knowledge and ideology <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 3 <i>Polling and the Public</i>, chapter 2 Additional reading: Popkin selection</p> <p>Essay posted on Oct. 20; due Nov. 22</p>
Oct. 20, 25	<p>Sources of opinion: Values, political culture, and self-interest <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 6. Additional reading: Nelson et al. article, George Lakoff piece</p>
Oct. 27	<p>MIDTERM EXAMINATION IN CLASS</p>
Nov. 1	<p>Interpreting public opinion and opinion trends <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 4 <i>Polling and the Public</i>, chapter 8</p>
Nov. 3, 8	<p>Attitude change <i>Influence: Science and Practice</i>, entire book</p>
Nov. 10, 15	<p>Mass media and public opinion <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 8 <i>Polling and the Public</i>, chapter 6 Additional reading: Iyengar piece, Patterson piece</p>
Nov. 17, 22	<p>Public opinion and political change <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapters 9, 10 <i>Polling and the Public</i>, chapter 7</p> <p>Essay due Nov. 22</p>
Nov. 29, Dec. 1	<p>Public opinion and democracy <i>Public Opinion</i>, chapter 11 <i>Polling and the Public</i>, chapter 9</p>
<p>Final Examination: Thursday, December 8, 1:30-3:18 p.m.</p>	