

## Political Science 603: Public Opinion

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Office hours: Wednesday 1-3 p.m.

Winter Quarter, 2001  
Monday, Wednesday, 3:30 - 5:18  
238 Denney Hall

### Course Description

What is public opinion? Where does it come from? How does it change? What does it matter? These are fascinating questions, and in this course we will attempt to answer them using the results of scientific studies and our own wisdom and imagination. The answers to all these questions, we will learn, are not as simple or obvious as they might first seem. We will explore the landscape of opinion on a variety of political topics. We will attempt to find out what the public thinks about these issues, and more importantly, why they think the way they do. Our analysis will draw extensively from scientific studies of attitudes in the fields of political science and social psychology. We will also attempt to understand how attitudes change. Finally, we will explore the political ramifications of public opinion. We will try to find out how a person's political opinions influence their behavior, and whether or not political leaders pay any attention to, or manipulate, "the will of the public."

### Course Requirements and Grading

There will be two examinations: a midterm during the class period on Tuesday, February 9, and a final during the scheduled examination period. 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. You will also write a 6-8 page paper, due at the end of the quarter. The format of the paper and exams will be discussed in class.

Time will be set aside almost every week for class discussion. I will give some small consideration to those who make a sincere effort to participate. You don't need to say brilliant things every time, but thoughtful comments will be rewarded. We will all learn more with active class discussion.

The breakdown of the grading is as follows:

Midterm Examination	30%
Final Examination	35%
Paper	30%
Class Participation	5%

### Course Website

There is a course website: [http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu:8080/webct/public/show\\_courses.pl](http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu:8080/webct/public/show_courses.pl). The website will contain lecture outlines, sample test questions, paper assignments, etc. You should visit it often. On your first visit, you need to register for the course. Your ID and password have been set as the first letter of your middle name and your last name. So, my ID and password would be enelson.

You should change your password after you register. If you have any questions or problems, please let me know.

### Readings

Three books are required for purchase: *Public Opinion* by Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe, and Shapiro; *Influence: The Science of Persuasion* by Cialdini; and *If it Bleeds, It Leads: An Anatomy of Television News* by Kerbel. All are available at the OSU Bookstore. In addition, a small packet of readings is required; this may be purchased at Cop-Ez in Bricker Hall.

January 3	<b>Course overview; introduction to the science of public opinion research</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chapter 1.
January 8, 10	<b>The scope and methods of public opinion research</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chaps. 2, 3.
January 17 no class on Jan. 15	<b>Sources of opinion: The psychology of attitudes</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chaps. 4, 5.
January 22, 24	<b>Sources of opinion: Values, political culture, and self-interest</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chaps. 7, 10 “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response” by John Zaller and Stanley Feldman. In readings packet..
January 29, 31	<b>Political knowledge and ideology</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chap. 8. “How People Think, Feel, and Reason about Civil Liberties” by Dennis Chong. In readings packet.
February 5, 7	<b>Midterm examination in class February 7</b> <b>Attitude change</b> <i>Influence: The Science of Persuasion</i> , Chaps. 1, 2.
February 12, 14	<b>Attitude change, continued</b> <i>Influence: The Science of Persuasion</i> , Chaps. 3-7.
February 19, 21	<b>Mass media and public opinion</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chap. 11.
February 26, 28	<b>Mass media and public opinion, continued</b> <i>If it Bleeds...</i> , all.
March 5, 7	<b>The “conversation” between leaders and citizens</b> <i>Public Opinion</i> , Chap. 9.
<b>Final Examination: Wednesday, March 14, 3:30 PM</b>	



**Paper Assignment**  
**Political Science 603; Winter, 2001**  
**Professor Thomas E. Nelson**

There are two options for this assignment:

1. Analyze the results of an opinion poll published in a newspaper, magazine, or website within the last six months. The poll must concern opinion on some kind of political issue or topic. Analyze the results of the poll from the perspective of one or more of the theories we have discussed concerning the nature and origins of public opinion. Offer your opinion about which theory (or theories) provides the best explanation for the results of the poll. You may find that no single theory completely accounts for all opinions on the issue in question.
2. Find a persuasive political advertisement or piece of propaganda, such as a pamphlet or brochure, newspaper or magazine ad, etc. Discuss the "tactics" in the message, using some of the theories of persuasion and influence discussed in class or in Cialdini's book. You may even wish to suggest how the ad might be improved through the application of another persuasive tactic. Include a copy of the persuasive piece with your paper.

Regardless of which option you choose, please follow these guidelines:

- The paper must be 6-8 pages in length, double-spaced, with reasonable font and margins. Title pages and bibliographies do not count toward the 6-8 page length. Pages must be numbered.
- The paper does not require outside reading, other than the newspaper clipping or advertisement itself. If you wish to do extra reading on the topic, I can give you some suggestions for where to look. A bibliography section is not needed unless you include outside sources.
- If you use a published poll or advertisement, it must be no more than six months old!
- You must cite ideas that are not your own, with the exception of lecture material. I will discuss proper citation format in class.