

POLA 6180: Public Opinion & Voting Behavior

Instructor

Dr. Brian J. Brox

Phone

504-862-8325

Email

bbrox@tulane.edu

Website

<http://www.tulane.edu/~bbrox>

Office Location

Norman Mayer 302

Office Hours

Tue/Wed/Thur

12:00 – 1:00 PM

and by appointment

Course Information for Spring 2023

CRN: 53338

Date & Time: Tuesday & Thursday 2:00–3:15 PM

Classroom: Richardson Building 201

Course Overview

This course explores public opinion and voting behavior in contemporary American politics. The course covers the development of political attitudes and how what we learn as children affects what we believe and do as adults. Looking at recent trends in public opinion about current issues, students will examine how public opinion is measured, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of surveys and polls.

Students will also learn about how to analyze public opinion data. The second half of the course looks at voting behavior. In particular we will cover how Americans decide whether or not to participate in elections (turnout) and how they choose among candidates (vote choice). Looking at recent elections for president and Congress, students will examine the theories that seek to explain American voting behavior and then apply those theories to actual data on American voters.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated the following learning outcomes: 1) demonstrate advanced substantive knowledge of American political attitudes and behavior; 2) articulate and evaluate theories of public opinion formation and expression; and 3) articulate and evaluate theories of the causes and consequences of voting behavior among Americans. These learning outcomes contribute to the following program outcomes: 1) students will be able to demonstrate research skills and utilize the proper methodologies necessary to write a paper in the discipline of political science; and 2) students will have an advanced knowledge of the political institutions and processes that shape public opinion and voting behavior in the United States.

Required Texts

- Clawson & Oxley, *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. 4th Edition (2021). Sage. ISBN: 9781544390208
- Theiss-Morse & Wagner, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. 15th Edition (2023). Sage. ISBN: 9781071822173

Additional readings (marked with a * on the course schedule) will be available on the course page on Canvas, either as PDFs or links to journal articles hosted through the library's website.

Assignments

There will be eight components to the grade in this course. Each week (two class meetings) will cover one topic, and on the Thursday of each week a pair of students will serve as discussion leaders. Instructions for discussion leadership are at the end of the syllabus. Additionally, students will complete a research essay that explores an aspect of public opinion and/or voting behavior and incorporates the analysis of primary data. Students will also take midterm and final exams. Finally, class participation will be noted and factored into the final grade. These components will contribute to the final course grade as follows:

Assignment	Date Due	Points
Discussion Leader	<i>varies</i>	10 Points
Midterm Exam	March 21	25 Points
Final Exam	May 9	25 Points
Research Essay	May 2	20 Points
Participation	<i>throughout</i>	20 Points
TOTAL		100 TOTAL POINTS

Course Policies

- **Format:** This course is a seminar. As a result, attendance is critical both for individual student learning as well as the successful operation of each class session. Students should come with course materials read in advance, prepared to engage one another in discussion. In all circumstances students are encouraged to stop me for questions or comments.
- **Grading:** This course will be graded according to Tulane's plus/minus grading system. Grades will be available by seeing me before or after class or during office hours. I will not provide grades over email or by phone.

A	93-100	A-	90-92.99	B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99	B-	80-82.99	C+	77-79.99
C	73-76.99	C-	70-72.99	D+	67-69.99
D	63-66.99	D-	60-62.99	F	59.99 and below

- **Expectations:** Students are expected to attend each class, to be on time, and to have all course materials read prior to the first class in each unit. Please turn off all electronic devices during class. Laptop computers are not permitted in class; please turn them off and put them away before class starts. All assignments must be completed for a student to pass the course. Requests for regrading any exam or assignment must be made no later than one week after it has been returned. No make-ups will be allowed except in very serious circumstances (I reserve the right to determine what is "very serious"). Course incompletes will only be allowed for circumstances in which the student is physically unable to complete the course; the student must otherwise be passing the course in order to be granted an incomplete.
- **Accommodations:** If you have any kind of special circumstances, such as a disability, illness, or handicap, or if you are involved with a university activity that requires you to miss class, let me know as soon as possible. This information is confidential. All students attending Tulane University with documented disabilities are eligible and encouraged to apply for services with the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility. Please see me or go to <https://accessibility.tulane.edu> for more information. Students needing accommodations must provide me a copy of the accommodation granted by the Goldman Center as soon as possible.

- **Academic Integrity:** As described in the Tulane University [Code of Academic Conduct](#), students are expected to uphold the honor and integrity of the academic process. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating on an exam (either providing answers to or receiving answers from another student), plagiarism (the use of another author's words or arguments without attribution), and unauthorized collaboration (working with another person in preparing written work for fulfillment of any course requirement). If a student commits any violation of academic integrity, I will pursue disciplinary action as outlined in the Code of Academic Conduct.

- **Academic Freedom:** In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may disagree with each other at times, or with me. These differences can help enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where students (and I) will be encouraged to think and learn. In any event, grades will not be adversely affected by any beliefs expressed in class or in assignments.

- **Note regarding syllabus dates:** Please take into consideration the dates of exams and the due dates for essays when scheduling other activities, travel, etc. This applies especially to course requirements that occur immediately before or after holidays. Note also that the final exam date is set by the registrar. Students must take the exam on this date; exceptions can only be granted by the Dean of Newcomb Tulane College. Finally, please note the university-designated makeup dates: March 11-12, April 15-16. These dates will be used for makeup classes in the event of a university closure.

- **Religious Accommodation Policy:** https://registrar.tulane.edu/Academic_Calendar (bottom of the page)

- **Title IX Policy / Support:** <https://allin.tulane.edu/>

- **Code of Student Conduct:** <https://conduct.tulane.edu/resources/code-student-conduct>

- **Compliance with COVID-19 Regulations:** <https://tulane.edu/covid-19/health-strategies>

Course Schedule

•First week	January 17 January 19	Introduction to the Class / Go Over Syllabus <i>no class – professor away at a meeting</i>
•Second week	January 24, 26	Intro to Public Opinion / Intro to Voting Behavior
Required:	Clawson & Oxley chapter 1 (and chapter 1 appendix)	
	*Niemi, Weisberg, and Kimball, <i>Controversies in Voting Behavior</i> , ch. 1	
Recommended:	<i>The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior</i>	
•Unit 1	Jan. 31, Feb 2	Socialization, Opinion Formation
Required:	Clawson & Oxley chapter 2	
	*Luskin, “ <u>Explaining Political Sophistication</u> ,” <i>Political Behavior</i>	
	*Zaller, <i>The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion</i> , chapter 3	
Recommended:	Lupia & McCubbins <i>The Democratic Dilemma</i>	
•Unit 2	February 7, 9	Information
Required:	Clawson & Oxley chapter 8	
	*Delli Carpini & Keeter, <i>What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters</i> , chapter 2	
	*Converse, “ <u>The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics</u> ”	
Recommended:	Delli Carpini & Keeter, <i>What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters</i> (all)	

- Unit 3 February 14, 16 Heuristics

Required *Lau & Redlawsk, *How Voter Decide*, chapter 11

 *Mondak, "Public Opinion and Heuristic..." *Political Behavior*

Recommended: Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*

- February 21 *no class – Mardi Gras Break*

• February 23 *no class – professor out of town*

- Unit 4 Feb. 28, March 2 Attitude Stability & Change

Required: Clawson & Oxley chapter 4

 *Ansolabehere et al, "The Strength of Issues," *American Pol. Science Rev.*

 *Peterson et al., "Do People Really Become..." *Journal of Politics*

Recommended: Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*

 Page & Shapiro, *The Rational Public*

- Unit 5 March 7, 9 Measurement

Required: *Bardes & Oldendick, *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*, chapter 3

 *Wilson, "The Measurement of Public Opinion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*

 *Berinsky, "Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys," *Ann. Rev. of Pol.Sci.*

Recommended: Asher, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*

 Stonecash, *Political Polling: Strategic Information in Campaigns*

The Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods

The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research

•Unit 6 March 14, 16 Media

Required: Clawson & Oxley chapter 3
 Theiss-Morse & Wagner chapter 7
 *Scheufele & Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming" *Jour. Of Comm*

Recommended: Iyengar & Kinder, *News That Matters*
 McCombs et al, *The News and Public Opinion*

• March 21 MIDTERM EXAM

•Unit 7 March 23, 28 Groups

Required: Clawson & Oxley chapter 7
 *Nelson & Kinder, "Issue Frames..." *Journal of Politics*
 *Kinder & Winter, "Exploring the Racial Divide" *Amer. Journal of Pol. Sci.*
 *Huddy et al. "Gender, Public Opinion, and Political Reasoning"

Recommended: Katz and Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence*

•Unit 8 March 30, April 11 Party Identification

Required: Clawson & Oxley chapter 5
 Theiss-Morse & Wagner chapter 5
 *Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chapter 4

Recommended: Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (all)
 Abramowitz, "The Rise of Negative Partisanship..." *Electoral Studies*
 Keith et al., *The Myth of the Independent Voter*
 Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*

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Discussion Leader Instructions

Every week two members of the class will serve as Discussion Leaders. The DLs will work with the professor to guide the class through the readings, raising interesting questions and exploring the concepts raised in the readings. The DLs should be particularly aware of how the concepts raised in the readings might link to behavior we have seen recently in the American political system (i.e. look for real-world, practical examples).

Each week there will be articles or chapters that everyone will read for class on Tuesday. This material will provide a common background/basis for discussion. Beyond those articles, each discussion leader will make one additional selection for each topic (so two more total) that everyone will read for class on Thursday.

Specific instructions for the Discussion Leaders:

1. Pick your topic/week.
2. Before your assigned week, search for scholarly articles¹ on your topic.
3. Select one for the entire class to read. This selection needs to be done by the TUESDAY before your scheduled Thursday discussion leadership.
4. (The Professor and the rest of the class will read those two articles and prepare for class on Thursday.)
5. Prepare your “lecture notes.” This should include a summary of the Tuesday readings, a summary of the two additional readings, and any important questions or topics you want to cover in class.
6. Lead class on Thursday. Class will begin with the two discussion leaders summarizing the articles and noting why they selected the articles that they did and how those articles relate to each other and to the Tuesday readings. The DLs will then guide class discussion, raising important points, referencing real-world examples, and discussing data and methodological considerations. The Professor will help guide the discussion.

¹ A “scholarly work” includes academic monographs and edited volumes or scholarly journals (such as those found through academic search engines). Popular news sources are not considered reputable for this field. Similarly, not all books are equal, and polemics that show little evidence of research should be avoided; books published by university presses are generally considered scholarly. The most appropriate journals for this project include: *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Behavior*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *American Politics Research*. See also: <http://www.tulane.edu/~bbrox/journals.html>

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Research Essay

In this project you will explore some aspect of American public opinion and/or voting behavior. The goal is to write an essay on a *current* topic in public opinion and/or voting behavior, relating it to previous findings and exploring current data on the topic.

Your essay should be 8-10 pages (typed, double spaced, 1 inch margins, appreciate citations) and is due **in hard copy at the beginning of class on May 2, 2023**.

The essay should include:

- A clear description of the topic and why it is important
 - Is this something that is currently impacting American politics?
 - Or is it a perennial issue?
 - Why should we care about understanding this topic?
- A literature review² on this topic
 - Think of this section as the way to relate your project to the course topics.
 - Consider the sources included in the notes at the end of the relevant textbook chapter(s). Also look through JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the library catalog to find scholarly sources³.
- A discussion of current public opinion on this topic
 - ‘Current’ means within the last year or two
 - You **do not** have to download and analyze public opinion data, but you have to find (and cite!) at least three polls or reports on the current state of public opinion on your topic
 - Possible sources include Pew, Gallup, or polls in the Roper Archive or listed in pollingreport.com

² “A literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. In writing the literature review, your purpose is to convey to your reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is not just a descriptive list of the material available, or a set of summaries.” See: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>

³ See footnote # 1 on previous page.

- Evaluate your current findings in light of the findings reviewed in the literature review
 - Does current public opinion/voting behavior conform to our scholarly understanding?
 - Or has something changed? What has changed, and why do you think it has?
- Conclude your essay with a review of your findings and the implications for politics, governing, campaigns & elections, etc.
- Then include your works cited page, any graphs/figures, and any necessary appendices.

Please contact me if you need further information about any of these components.