

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND PUBLIC OPINION
POLI 4030
M-W-F 1:30-2:30

Instructor: Angela F. McCarthy
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COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is to examine public opinion among Americans. We will discuss political attitude measurement processes, data collection and polling, the effect of political knowledge on attitudes, the role of ideology and partisanship on public opinion, the origins of mass opinions, trends in public opinion as it relates to various salient issues, group differences in political opinions, the influence of the media in impacting political attitudes, and the effect of public opinion on policy and policymakers. During the semester, you will engage with the course materials that will further your understanding of public opinion and political research. Not only will we address political attitudes among the mass public, but we will also consider the role of current political topics and its influence in shaping American beliefs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

American Public Opinion, (9th edition).
Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin
ISBN: 9780133862676

Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know (9th edition).
Herb Asher
ISBN: 9781506352428

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Exams: 45%. There are three exams. Each exam is worth 15% of your final grade. Read the assigned materials for the exams. During class, we will discuss exam questions and answers.
2. Assignments: 45%. There are *nine* weekly assignments. Each assignment is worth 5% of your final grade. There will be one (or two) bonus assignments.
3. Class discussion: 10%. You are expected to give your (informed) opinion. This is a political attitudes/public opinion class.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

1. Exams: 45%. See "class schedule" for exam dates. Prior to the exam, you will receive a list of approximately 20 terms. I will choose *five* terms for the exam. You will write a one or two paragraph response. **DO NOT WRITE MORE THAN TWO PARAGRAPHS. I WILL STOP READING.** For each exam, you will be given a bonus term. If answered correctly, I will add **1 point to your final grade in the class.** Because there are three exams, you will have the opportunity to add three points to your overall grade. Yes, the bonus terms will be included in the list of terms that are provided the week before each exam.

2. Assignments: 45%. Please note that the assignment portion of the class is worth the same amount as the exams. This should be good news! Assignments should not be difficult. Each week, I will provide students with a prompt that they must answer. Students must complete the task by the **beginning of class** on the assigned date: see the “course schedule” for date details. All assignments are submitted via Moodle and are time stamped. Please do not send in late assignments- they will not be graded.

Overall, assignment topics will pertain to the readings during the week. These assignments will NOT be based on textbook readings. The purpose of this activity is not to stress you out, cause panic, or add difficulty to your semester. If you are reading the material (skimming the material- we will talk about this later), you will be in a very good position to earn a high score. The readings will help you to better understand contemporary public opinion on an issue or event. Essentially, the textbook chapters will provide the foundation and the readings will **enrich** your understanding.

I will provide assignment questions during class on **Wednesday**. If you are not in class, do not e-mail me to ask about the assignment. You will need to ask a classmate or someone who is privy to the assignment question. I will NOT provide the question to someone who is not in class unless you have a university approved excuse for your absence.

Please note that the complexity of the assignments depends on your participation in class. Good class participation will yield easy(easier) assignments. Our motto: read, engage, critically think, and participate!

3. Class discussion: 10%. Discussion grades are based on your contribution to the class. First, because this is a political science class you are expected to stay up to date on current events. The class will spend a few minutes each **Monday** discussing “politics.” **Come to class well informed**. This is the time to demonstrate that you are somewhat aware of what is going on in our country and around the world. For example, if there is a groundbreaking story about President Obama and President Trump being long lost brothers, then I expect you to know something about it.

Tip: PBS NEWSHOUR and NPR are great resources. Try to stay away from partisan media outlets. If you decide to use partisan outlets, tread lightly and think critically about what you are consuming. Example available on Moodle: “Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?” (Levendusky 2013).

Another way to succeed in obtaining a respectable class discussion score is to come to class prepared to enlighten the group about a specific poll question of your choosing (as it relates to the topic of the week). If you are wise, you will use a poll question from the assigned weekly readings. We will discuss poll questions on **Wednesdays**.

GRADING POLICY

Grading scale: 97.0 to 100 A+, 93.0 to 96.9 A, 90.0 to 92.9 A-, 87.0 to 89.9 B+, 83.0 to 86.9 B, 80.0 to 92.9 B-, 77.0 to 79.9 C+, 73.0 to 76.9 C, 70.0 to 72.9 C-, 67.0 to 69.9 D+, 63.0 to 66.9 D, 60.0 to 62.9 D, below 60.0 F.

If you have a disability which may require accommodation, contact the Office of Services of Students with Disabilities. You can find more information at <http://students.lsu.edu/disability>.

Attending class: Class attendance is required and expected. You will need to fulfill your commitment and obligation to be in class and on time every day that class is held. There are several breaks scheduled throughout the semester—we will not be fatigued. Please do not come to class ill. If you think that you are ill then stay home, get some rest, go to the doctor, and recover. We can make arrangements on how to accommodate your missing class.

Late work: **Late work is not accepted.** If you find yourself unable to complete your assignments on time, e-mail me as soon as possible. I reserve the right to make an exception, provided there is a valid excuse. *Students should assume that I will NOT accept late assignments.* Of course, you are allowed to make up exams and assignments with a university approved excuse.

It is your obligation to observe the LSU Code of Student Conduct and Commitment to Community. See www.lsu.edu/saa. It is also your responsibility to refrain from cheating, academic misconduct, or plagiarism. If you are uncertain about what this means or if you are questioning your academic integrity, contact me immediately. I am happy and willing to answer any questions that you may have. ***Without exception, students who engage in academic misconduct will be reported to the Dean of Students.***

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Public Opinion Overview

1-10: Introduction/Data demonstration

1-12: APO: Public Opinion in Democratic Societies (1)
“From #MAGA to #MeToo: A look at U.S. public opinion in 2017”
“The American Public in 2017: What We Learned”

WEEK 2 Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know

1-15: No class

1-17: SNOW BREAK

1-19: SNOW BREAK

WEEK 3 Polling and Public Opinion

1-22: APO: Public Opinion in Democratic Societies (1)

1-24: APO: Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion (2)

1-26: “17 striking findings from 2017”

WEEK 4 Microlevel Opinion

1-29: APO: Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion (2)

1-31: “The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider”

“Partisan Differences Growing on a Number of Issues”

2-2: APO: Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion (2)

Assignment #1: Political Polarization

- WEEK 5 Microlevel Opinion/ EXAM**
- 2-5: APO: Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion-Holding (3)
- 2-7: **EXAM 1**
- 2-9: APO: Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion-Holding (3)
 “Political Typology Reveals Deep Fissures on the Right and Left: Conservative Republican Groups divided on immigration, ‘openness’”
 Assignment #2: Typology
- WEEK 6 Macrolevel Opinion**
- 2-12: Mardi Gras Holiday
- 2-14: APO: Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Political Sentiment (4)
- 2-16: APO: Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Political Sentiment (4)
- WEEK 7 Socialization and Learning**
- 2-19: APO: Political Socialization and Political Learning (5)
- 2-21: “Beyond Liberals and Conservatives to Political Genotypes and Phenotypes”
 “Biology, Politics, and the Emerging Science of Human Nature”
 “Genes and Ideologies”
- 2-23: APO: Political Socialization and Political Learning (5)
- WEEK 8 Public Opinion and Democratic Stability**
- 2-26: APO: Public Opinion and Democratic Stability (6)
- 2-28: “Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government: Broad criticism, but positive performance ratings in many areas”
 “Americans View Government as Nation’s Top Problem in 2017”
 “How Americans Perceive Government in 2017”
- 3-2: Assignment #3: Political Trust
- WEEK 9 Group Differences**
- 3-5: APO: Group Differences in Political Opinions (7)
- 3-7: “How blacks and whites view the state of race in America”
 “How do your views on gender compare with those of other Americans?”
 “How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health”
- 3-9: Assignment #4: Group Differences
- WEEK 10 The Media**
- 3-12: APO: The News Media and Political Opinions (8)
- 3-14: “Americans’ Attitudes About the News Media Deeply Divided Along Partisan Lines: Democrats are 47 points more likely than Republicans to support news media’s watchdog role”
 “Republicans’, Democrats’ Views of Media Accuracy Diverge”
- 3-16: Assignment #5: The Media

WEEK 11

- 3-19: **EXAM 2**
3-21: Polling and the Public
3-23: Polling and the Public
Assignment #6: Polling and the Public

WEEK 12: Spring Break: 3-26 through 3-30**WEEK 13 Elections**

- 4-2: APO: Elections as Instruments of Popular Control (9)
- 4-4: "Support for Same-Sex Marriage Grows, Even Among Groups That Had Been Skeptical"
"Public Opinion on Abortion: Views on abortion, 1995-2017"
"Few Americans support cuts to most government programs, including Medicaid"
"Less than half the public views border wall as an important goal for U.S. immigration policy"
- 4-6: No class, conference Assignment #7: Issues

WEEK 14 The Public and its Elected Leaders

- 4-9: APO: The Public and its Elected Leaders (10)
- 4-11: "A Deep Dive into Party Affiliation: Sharp Differences by Race, Gender, Generation, Education"
"Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016: Highly negative views of the opposing party- and its members"
"The Parties on the Eve of the 2016 Election: Two Coalitions, Moving Further Apart: Trends in voter party identification 1992- 2016"
- 4-13: Assignment #8: Parties

WEEK 15 Performance of Democracy

- 4-16: APO: Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy (11)
- 4-18: "A Divided and Pessimistic Electorate: Voters skeptical of progress in many areas- even jobs- since 2008"
"Do Americans Believe Capitalism and Government Are Working? Religious Left, Religious Right & the Future of the Economic Debate"
- 4-20: Assignment #9: Performance of Democracy

WEEK 16: Special Topic: Religion

- 4-23: **EXAM 3**
- 4-25: "One Nation, Divided, Under Trump: Findings from the 2017 American Values Survey"
4-27: "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic"
BONUS Assignment #10: Religion

April 30-May 5: Final Exam