Topics in Public Opinion

POLS 234
The University of Vermont
Spring 2018
Tu Th 2:50-4:05 PM
Old Mill Annex, A-500

Contact Information

Dr. Deborah L. Guber
Associate Professor of Political Science
519 Old Mill

Phone: 656-4062
E-mail: Deborah.Guber@uvm.edu
Internet: http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00-2:30 PM, and by appointment.

Course Description

This course will examine public opinion and mass political behavior in the United States, with a special emphasis on environmental issues. Among the topics to be explored are the ways in which ordinary citizens make sense of their political world, the quality and sophistication of public opinion, the interplay between mass attitudes and public policy, and the motivations that underlie political participation and electoral choice.

Course Requirements

Our emphasis throughout the semester will be on critical thinking and the development of strong, analytical writing skills. Graded assignments are designed to evaluate your growth in these areas. Assignments are also designed to give you many opportunities, using different skills, to build a strong grade in this course.

1. Your attendance and active participation is *essential* to the effectiveness of this class. It will account for 25% of your final score.

2. Two essay-based exams will be administered in class, each worth 25% of your final grade. The first will be on Thursday, March 22, and the second on Tuesday, May 1. In addition, I reserve the right to give occasional pop-quizzes if it appears that students are ill-prepared for class.

3. The remainder of your grade—25%—will be determined by a 10-page research paper on public attitudes toward an issue of your choice (for instance: the environment, the war on terror, immigration, etc.). While this project is due at the end of term—no later than 1:30 PM on Tuesday, May 8—I will expect you to follow your topic throughout the semester and relate it to the broader subjects we discuss in class. Further details will follow shortly in the form of a separate handout.

Required Reading

The following books are required reading for this course:

- Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin, <u>American Public Opinion</u>, 9th edition. New York: Routledge (2014).

  ISBN: 0133862674

- Herbert Asher, <u>Polling and the Public</u>, 8th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (2011).

  ISBN: 1604266066

All remaining assignments are available on our class website, under the heading "Calendar," at:

http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS234/Spring_2018

Occasionally (and for a variety of reasons), I may decide to substitute one reading assignment for another. If that happens, I will make an announcement in class in advance of the day in question and place the new article online in place of the former. When in doubt, our class website will take precedence over the paper copy you receive at the start of term.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions inspired by the reading assignments are posted on our class website and should be reviewed prior to each class.

Grading Standards

The grades I assign to written work are based on the following criteria:

- **Excellent (A range):** Grades in the "A" range are reserved for work that is *superior* in quality. "A" essays are lively, interesting, and intellectually sophisticated. The writer develops a clear and creative thesis, and supports their argument with solid and persuasive evidence. The paper itself is polished and beautifully written, free of grammatical and typographical errors. Above all, "A" essays reflect originality. The writer's own voice and logic are present on the page.

- **Good (B range):** Grades in the "B" range reflect work that is *good* to *very good* in quality. The essay completes all of the requirements of the assignment at hand. It may have minor errors and flaws, but the foundation of the work is solid, clear, and reasonably well-organized. "B" essays address topics in a thoughtful way, but offer less insight and originality than "A" essays.

- **Fair (C range):** A "C" essay represents work that is *satisfactory* in quality. The writer offers a thesis, but it is usually too broad, or too vague. The essay tends to make

assertions without offering specific examples or supporting evidence from class lectures, discussions, and reading assignments. The overall impression of the paper is that of a rough draft. More effort at revision is encouraged and spelling and grammatical errors often require correction.

- **Poor (D range):** "D" work is *unsatisfactory*. It is sloppy, incoherent and poorly written, marred by mechanical faults (e.g., errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling), and/or factual errors. The writer has difficulty developing an idea, and holding a paragraph together. The thesis of the paper—that is, what the paper is arguing—is usually absent or incomplete.

- **Failing (F):** A *failing* grade is given for work that is exceedingly poor, cannot be understood, or has little relevance to the course.

- **No Credit (0):** A grade of "zero" is given for any work that is not completed in full.

In addition, please note the following regarding assigned work:

In fairness to others, students are not permitted to do "extra credit," either to compensate for a poor grade or a missed class.

If a student misses an exam for reasons that are both serious and outside of their control, they may make up that work, but only on a set day and time. During the Spring 2018 term, all make-up work must be completed on <u>Wednesday, May 9, between 1:00-2:15 PM</u>.

Finally, I expect all take-home assignments to be submitted in a timely fashion. I will reduce grades on late papers by one-third of one letter grade per day. In other words, a final paper received after 1:30 PM on Tuesday, May 8 will (at most) receive an A-, after that time the following day, a B+, and so on. Please do not be late!

Class Attendance and Participation

Class attendance and participation account for 25% of your final grade in this class. Attendance is recorded by your signature on the sheets passed around in class each day. All students receive two excused absences to cover minor illnesses and family emergencies, but 10 points will be deducted from your attendance grade for every class you miss after the first two. In other words, if you miss class frequently it is possible for your score to fall into negative numbers.

Please note that you may <u>NOT</u> use these excused absences for frivolous events first (e.g., oversleeping, skiing, a shopping trip to Montreal, etc.) and then request more later when serious circumstances develop.

You should also to be aware of the following:

- You are solely responsible for making sure you sign the attendance sheet before leaving class. If you do not, your name *cannot* be added at a later point.

- Any student involved in the forgery of signatures—either on the "giving" or "receiving" end—will receive an automatic *zero* for that entire portion of their grade, and may in addition be subject to the university's policy on academic honesty.

Beyond the two described above, I do not grant additional excused absences unless you are observing a religious holiday, you travel out of town as a member of an officially sanctioned UVM sports team, or serious medical or personal circumstances develop. If you are the member of a team, please be sure to forward a copy of your schedule to me in writing as soon as it becomes available so that attendance sheets can be marked accordingly on those days when your team travels out of town.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to be familiar with the UVM "Code of Academic Integrity" and with its standards, in particular. For instance:

1. <u>Students may not plagiarize</u>. All ideas, arguments, and phrases, submitted without attribution to other sources must be the creative product of the student. Thus, all text passages taken from the works of other authors (published or unpublished) must be properly cited. The same applies to paraphrased text, opinions, data, examples, illustrations, and all other creative work. Violations of this standard constitute plagiarism.

2. <u>Students may not fabricate</u>. All experimental data, observations, interviews, statistical surveys, and other information collected and reported as part of academic work must be authentic. Any alteration, e.g., the removal of statistical outliers, must be clearly documented. Data must not be falsified in any way. Violations of this standard constitute fabrication.

3. <u>Students may work cooperatively, but not collude</u>. Students are encouraged to collaborate on academic work within any limits that may be prescribed by their instructors. Students may only provide, seek or accept information about any academic work that will be submitted for a grade, to or from another student, with the authorization of the instructor. Violations of this standard constitute collusion.

4. <u>Students may not cheat</u>. Students must adhere to the guidelines provided by their instructors for completing academic work. Students may not claim as their own work any portion of academic work that was completed by another student. Students may only use materials approved by their instructor when completing an assignment or exam. Students may not present the same (or substantially the same) work for more than one course or within the same course without obtaining approval from the instructor of each course. Students must adhere to all course reserves regulations. Students may not act dishonestly or convey information that the student knows or should know to be false, by actions such as lying, forging or altering any document or record in order to gain an unfair academic advantage. Violations of this standard constitute cheating.

Offenses against this code are deemed serious and insult the integrity of the entire academic community. Suspected violations will be reported immediately to the Center for Student Ethics & Standards for further investigation and may result in sanctions as serious as an automatic "F" in the course, or even expulsion from the university.

Religious Holidays

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Please submit your documented religious holiday schedule for the semester to me by the end of the second full week of classes. Students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance will be permitted to make up that work.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact office of Student Accessibility Services on campus. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to faculty with recommended accommodations as early as possible each semester.

Location: A170 Living/Learning Center
Telephone: (802) 656-7753
E-mail: access@uvm.edu
Website: http://www.uvm.edu/access

Classroom Protocol

In coordination with the Department of Political Science, I have adopted the following protocol for classroom behavior:

1. Students are expected to attend and be prepared for *all* regularly scheduled classes.

2. Students are expected to arrive on time and remain in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that he or she will need to leave early, he or she must notify the instructor before the class period begins.

3. Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt class by leaving the room and reentering during class, must not distract class by making noise, and must be attentive to comments being made by the instructors and by peers.

4. Students must turn off and stow *all* electronic devices (e.g., laptops, iPads, cell phones, etc.) before class begins. Why don't I allow such devices for taking notes? This post from Buzzfeed says it all: "11 Things You're Actually Doing on Your Laptop During a Lecture" (http://tinyurl.com/kqpdbmh).

5. Students *may not* record, share, or disseminate classroom lectures or discussions in any way (e.g., through capturing audio, video, etc.).

Students in serious violation of any of these rules may be subject to whatever *grade penalty* I deem appropriate.

Asking for Help

Please be sure to ask questions whenever you need to. Here is how:

- I am generally available to answer quick questions after class.

- I hold office hours on a first-come, first-serve basis every Tuesday and Thursday from 1:00-2:30 PM. If those hours are not compatible with your schedule, please do not hesitate to ask for an appointment. My office is located on the 5th floor of Old Mill, room 519.

- While you can reach me by telephone at (802) 656-4062, e-mail is generally faster. I check e-mail on a regular basis, but please know that I only respond during normal business hours (e.g., not during the evening or on weekends). My e-mail address is: Deborah.Guber@uvm.edu

Class Calendar

*"We are all captives of the pictures in our head, our belief that
the world we experience is the world that really exists."*

—Walter Lippmann

I. MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

Tuesday, January 16: *Introductory Remarks*

- No reading assignment.

Thursday, January 18: *Public Opinion and the Classical Tradition*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 1 (sections 1-2).

- Walter Lippmann, "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." In, Public Opinion (1922): 3-32.

- James Bryce, "The Nature of Public Opinion." In, Morris Janowitz and Paul M. Hirsch, eds., Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication (1981): 3-9.

- A. Lawrence Lowell, "Public Opinion." In, Morris Janowitz and Paul M. Hirsch, eds. Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication (1981): 10-16.

Tuesday, January 23: *Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 1 (sections 3-7).

- Herbert Blumer, "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling," American Sociological Review, 13 (1948): 542-549.

- Philip E. Converse, "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process," Public Opinion Quarterly, 52 (1987): S12-S24.

- Adam J. Berinsky, "The Two Faces of Public Opinion," American Journal of Political Science, 43 (October 1999): 1209-1230.

Thursday, January 25: *A Primer on Survey Research*

- Asher (2011): Chapters 1-5.

- John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences," American Journal of Political Science, 36 (August 1992): 579-616.

Tuesday, January 30: *The Use (and Abuse) of Polls*

- Asher (2011): Chapters 6-9.

- Courtney Kennedy, et al., "An Evaluation of 2016 Election Polls in the U.S.," AAPOR (2017).

Thursday, February 1: *Beyond Numbers: The Quantitative-Qualitative Debate*

- Jennifer L. Hochschild, <u>What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice</u> (1981): Chapters 1-3, 8.

- James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin, "Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal: Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion," <u>Acta Politics</u>, 40 (2005): 284-298.

Tuesday, February 6: *The Rise of "Big Data"*

- Robert M. Groves, "Three Eras of Survey Research," <u>Public Opinion Quarterly</u>, 75 (2011): 861-871.

- Emily M. Cody, et al., "Climate Change Sentiment on Twitter: An Unsolicited Public Opinion Poll," <u>PLOS</u> (2015): 1-18.

- Laura Granka, "Using Online Search Traffic to Predict U.S. Presidential Elections," <u>PS: Political Science and Politics</u>, 46 (April 2013): 271-279.

II. SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION

Thursday, February 8: *Agents of Socialization*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 5.

- Richard G. Niemi and Mary A. Hepburn, "The Rebirth of Political Socialization," <u>Perspectives on Political Science</u>, 24 (1995): 7-16.

- Edgar Litt, "Civic Education, Community Norms, and Political Indoctrination," <u>American Sociological Review</u>, 28 (1963): 69-75.

Tuesday, February 13: *Political Knowledge*

- Walter Lippmann, "The Phantom Public." In, <u>The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity</u>, 4th edition. Edited by Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd (2007): 383-387.

- Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, "Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting First Things First," <u>American Journal of Political Science</u>, 37 (November 1993): 1179-1206.

- James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich, "Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship," <u>Journal of Politics</u>, 62 (August 2000): 790-816.

Thursday, February 15: *Anxiety and Emotion*

- Ted Brader, "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions," American Journal of Political Science, 49 (April 2005): 388-405.

- Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Charles Taber, and Gallya Lahav, "Threat Anxiety and Support for Antiterrorism Policies," American Journal of Political Science, 49 (July 2005): 593-608.

Tuesday, February 20: *Social Identities*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 7.

- Donald P. Green, Eric Schickler, and Bradley Palmquist, Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters (2002): Chapter 2, "Partisan Groups as Objects of Identification," 24-51.

- Donald L. Kinder and Nicholas Winter, "Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy," American Journal of Political Science, 45 (April 2001): 439-456.

Thursday, February 22: *Self-Interest*

- Paul R. Brewer, "Public Opinion, Economic Issues, and the Vote: Are Presidential Elections 'All About the Benjamins'?" In, Understanding Public Opinion, edited by Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (2001): 243-262.

- Robert Erikson, "Economic Conditions and the Presidential Vote," American Political Science Review, 83 (1989): 567-676.

Tuesday, February 27: *The News Media*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 8.

- Martin Gilens, "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media," Public Opinion Quarterly, 60 (1996): 515-541.

- Mark Hetherington, "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." American Journal of Political Science, 40 (1996): 372-395.

Thursday, March 1: *The News Media (continued)*

- John Zaller, "Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science," PS: Political Science & Politics, 31 (June 1998): 182-189.

- Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," Political Science Quarterly, 118 (Winter 2003-2004): 569-598.

☞ TOWN MEETING DAY RECESS: Tuesday, March 6

III. ORGANIZING ATTITUDES

Thursday, March 8: *The Nature of Mass Belief Systems*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 3.

- Mark A. Peffley and Jon Hurwitz, "A Hierarchical Model of Attitude Constraint," American Journal of Political Science, 29 (1985): 871-890.

- James W. Prothro and Charles M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," Journal of Politics, 22 (1960): 276-294.

🏝 SPRING RECESS: March 12-16

Tuesday, March 20: *Core Values and Beliefs*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 6.

- Stanley Feldman, "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values," American Journal of Political Science, 32 (May 1988): 416-440.

- Darren W. Davis and Brian D. Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America," American Journal of Political Science, 48 (January 2004): 28-46.

- James B. Murphy, "Tug of War," Education Next (Fall 2003): 70-76.

✏ EXAM #1: Thursday, March 22

IV. THE DISTRIBUTION OF OPINION

Tuesday, March 27: *One State, Two State, Red State, Blue State*

- Michael Barone, "The 49 Percent Nation," National Journal (June 9, 2001).

- Morris P. Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America (2006): Chapters 1-2.

- Riley E. Dunlap and Aaron M. McCright, "A Widening Gap: Republican and Democratic Views on Climate Change," Environment, 50 (September/October 2008): 26-35.

V. MOVEMENT IN PUBLIC OPINION

Thursday, March 29: *What Moves Public Opinion?*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 4.

- Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, <u>The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences</u> (1992): Chapter 2, "The Myth of Capricious Change," 37-66.

- James A. Stimson, <u>Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings</u> (1999): Chapter 2, "The Concept of Policy Mood," 19-36.

- Marc J. Hetherington and Michael Nelson, "Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism," <u>PS: Political Science and Politics</u>, 36 (January 2003): 37-42.

VI. ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Tuesday, April 3: *Social Capital and Civic Participation*

- Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," <u>The American Prospect</u>, 7 (1996).

- Garry Wills, "Putnam's America," <u>The American Prospect</u> (November 30, 2002).

- Keith Hampton, Lee Rainie, Weixu Lu, Maria Dwyer, Inyoung Shin, and Kristen Purcell, "Social Media and the Spiral of Silence," Pew Research Center (August 14, 2014): 1-44.

Thursday, April 5: *Understanding Trends in Voter Turnout*

- Thomas Patterson, "The Vanishing Voter: Why Are the Voting Booths So Empty?" <u>National Civic Review</u> (Winter 2002): 367-378.

- Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter," <u>American Political Science Review</u>, 95 (December 2001): 963-974.

📄 OUTLINE and BIBLIOGRAPHY: Due Thursday, April 5

Tuesday, April 10: *Getting Out the Vote*

- Marshall Ganz, "Motor Voter or Motivated Voter?" <u>The American Prospect</u>, 28 (1996): 41-48.

- Patrick C. Meirick and Daniel B. Wackman, "Kids Voting and Political Knowledge: Narrowing Gaps, Informing Votes," <u>Social Science Quarterly</u>, 85 (December 2004): 1161-1177.

- Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, "Does Canvassing Increase Voter Turnout? A Field Experiment," <u>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States</u>, 96 (September 1999): 10939-10942.

Thursday, April 12: *Models of Voting Behavior*

- Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," <u>American Political Science Review</u>, 74 (March 1980): 78-91.

- Morris Fiorina, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope, "The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election: Can Retrospective Voting Be Saved?" <u>British Journal of Political Science</u>, 33 (April 2003): 163-187.

Tuesday, April 17: *Elections as an Instrument of Popular Control*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014) Chapter 9.

- Richard R. Lau and David P. Redlawsk, "Voting Correctly," <u>American Political Science Review</u>, 91 (September 1997): 585-598.

- Larry M. Bartels, "Uniformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections," <u>American Journal of Political Science</u>, 40 (1996): 194-230.

VII. CONSEQUENCES

Thursday, April 19: *The Interplay between Public Opinion and Public Policy*
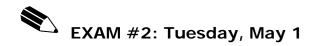
- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 10.

- Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," <u>American Political Science Review</u>, 77 (1983): 175-190.

- Robert Weissberg, "Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls," <u>Policy Analysis</u>, 301 (May 29, 2001): 1-16.

Tuesday, April 24: *Manipulating Opinion*

- Kathleen M. McGraw, "Manipulating Public Opinion." In, <u>Understanding Public Opinion</u>, edited by Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox (2001): 265-280.

- Michael Barone, "Polls are Part of the Air Politicians Breathe," <u>Public Perspective</u>," 8 (1997): 1-2.

- Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Debunking the Pandering Politician Myth," <u>Public Perspective</u>, 8 (April/May 1997): 3-5.

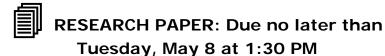- Frank Luntz, "The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America" (1995). See also: http://www.luntzspeak.com.

Thursday, April 26: *Trust in Government*

- Marc J. Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust, "American Political Science Review, 92 (December 1998): 791-808.

- John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, "Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be," American Political Science Review, 95 (March 2001): 145-153.

✏ EXAM #2: Tuesday, May 1

Thursday, May 3: *Governing by Public Opinion*

- Erikson and Tedin (2014): Chapter 11.

- V.O. Key, "Public Opinion and American Democracy." In, The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, 4th edition. Edited by Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd (2007): 387.

🗐 RESEARCH PAPER: Due no later than Tuesday, May 8 at 1:30 PM

POLS 234
Topics in Public Opinion
Spring 2018

Study Guide and Discussion Questions

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION (Thursday, January 18)

1. What does Walter Lippmann (1922) mean when he refers to the "pictures in our heads"? Who creates these pictures? Why are they so influential?

2. On the first page of his essay, James Bryce (1900) asks a deceptively simple question: "What do we mean by public opinion?" What answer does he give? Why is there confusion over the definition?

3. Bryce understands the nature of public opinion by looking at the way it percolates throughout society. It is something that grows and spreads, but also something that is made and manipulated. What four stages in its development does he identify?

4. According to Bryce, how much of the "average man's" views are "really of his own making"? What role do the "makers or leaders of opinion" play?

5. How does Bryce characterize the political and social beliefs of "nineteen persons out of very twenty"? Is his description fair?

6. Lowell (1913) says: "There is a common impression that public opinion depends upon and is measured by the mere number of persons to be found on each side of a question; but this is far from accurate." What, then, is it? Is unanimity required? A majority?

7. Lowell believes that "the ideas of people who possess the greatest knowledge of a subject are also of more weight than those of an equal number of ignorant persons." Is/should this be the case? Does/should "one man who holds his belief tenaciously count for as much as several men who hold theirs weakly?"

8. Finally, in comparison to Bryce and Lowell, how do Erikson and Tedin (2011) define the term "public opinion"? What do they mean when they say that "public opinion and the results of public opinion polls are not necessarily the same thing?" Do you agree?

CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION (Tuesday, January 23)

1. Blumer (1948) criticizes pollsters for being "so wedded to their technique and so preoccupied with the improvement of their technique that they shunt aside the vital question of whether their technique is suited to the study of what they are ostensibly seeking to study." Is this a fair criticism of polling today? Does public opinion consist merely of "what public opinion polls poll"?

2. According to Blumer, what "obvious and commonplace" characteristics of public opinion do pollsters routinely ignore?

3. Blumer believes that polls treat public opinion and its place in society in a way that is "markedly unrealistic." Explain what he means.

4. How does Converse (1987) respond to Blumer's criticism? Why, according to Converse, is the pollsters' view of public opinion better than Blumer's "antiquarian" view? Do you agree?

5. Where does Berinsky's (1999) work fit in to the Blumer vs. Converse debate?

6. Berinsky says that "under some circumstances, opinion polls may poorly reflect collective public sentiment…" Why? What examples does he give? What are the consequences?

A PRIMER ON SURVEY RESEARCH (Thursday, January 25)

1. According to Zaller and Feldman (1992), what are "attitudes" and how well do surveys measure them?

2. What, in contrast, are "non-attitudes"?

3. Zaller and Feldman argue that "opinion research is beset by two major types of 'artificial' variance." What are they?

4. What three axioms are introduced by Zaller and Feldman?

5. For those who work in the field of survey research, what are the consequences of Zaller and Feldman's work?

6. In Asher's book, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know* (2011), he stresses the importance of question wording, and even the order question in which questions are asked? Why? How does this connect to Zaller and Feldman's article?

7. With both reading assignments in mind, how easily can attitudes be manipulated within a survey? Can you think of any examples? Is it possible to reveal someone's "true" attitudes?

THE USE (AND ABUSE) OF POLLS (Tuesday, January 30)

1. How are public opinion polls used, and by whom? Are polls used for different purposes by different groups?

2. What standards has the American Association for Public Opinion Research adopted for reporting polls results? According to Asher (2007), how effective are they?

3. When it comes to election polls, there are many varieties. Can you name them?

4. Why are some election predictions so far off (e.g., the 2016 presidential election)?

5. Asher (2011) believes that the media is often careless and irresponsible when interpreting poll results. What are some examples?

6. According to Asher (2011), what questions should we keep in mind when evaluating polls?

BEYOND NUMBERS: THE QUANTITATIVE-QUALITATIVE DEBATE (Thursday, February 1)

1. What is Hochschild's (1981) book about? What question is she trying to address?

2. Describe the methodology she uses. How does it differ from standard survey research?

3. Hochschild makes four claims about the value of intensive interviewing, ranging from (in her words) the "cautious" to the "bold." What are they? Does she make a convincing case?

4. Hochschild argues that people apply different distributive norms to different domains, or spheres, of life. Describe what she means.

5. We tend to prefer modern polls because they are more representative, but as Hochschild demonstrates, we also lose something along the way-a sense of true deliberation, perhaps. Fishkin and Luskin (2005) argue that modern polls are "cognitively threadbare." How does their technique of "deliberative polling" attempt to redress that?

THE RISE OF "BIG DATA" (Tuesday, February 6)

1. According to Groves (2011), what are the three eras of survey research? What are the hallmarks of each? Why has the current era, in particular, presented such a challenge for survey researchers?

2. What is "big data"?

3. What should we make of Cody, et al.'s (2015) and Granka's (2013) use of "big data" to measure public sentiment toward climate change? Can non-representative samples from sources like Twitter really help to measure public opinion and political behavior? Why or why not?

4. What about online search queries? How does Granka (2013) use Google Trends to predict the outcome of the 2012 presidential election? Do the advantages she cites outweigh the concerns?

AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION (Thursday, February 8)

1. What is "political socialization?"

2. What are the primary agents of socialization (e.g., family, school, peer groups, etc.)? Which of these is most powerful?

3. When does political awareness begin? How important is "early learning"? What impact does it have on later life?

4. According to Niemi and Hepburn (1995), what "exaggerated premises" and "misunderstood research findings" led to the demise of research on political socialization?

5. What is the "primacy principle"? Are its assumptions accurate? If not, what forces cause adults to reconsider their positions?

6. Niemi and Hepburn write that "partisanship is relatively stable, but there is certainly no justification for capturing it at its earliest manifestation and assuming that it will persist through adulthood." Is this statement consistent with your own life experience?

7. Niemi and Hepburn say that the "high school years should perhaps hold the greatest interest for us because it is then that society makes the most explicit and concentrated effort to teach political knowledge and civic values." Consider Litt's (1963) findings on this point. In his opinion, how well do schools socialize students?

8. What advice do Niemi and Hepburn give for "reestablishing political socialization as a viable and vibrant field of study"?

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE (Tuesday, February 13)

1. In an excerpt from <u>The Phantom Public</u>, Walter Lippmann writes: "The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row, who ought to keep his mind on the mystery off there, but cannot quite manage to keep awake." Is this a accurate judgment, even if it is harsh? In spite of it, why is Lippmann sympathetic? What does he believe to be an "unattainable ideal"?

2. According to Carpini and Keeter (1993), what *should* people know about politics? Are national civics tests—frequently given to and failed by college students—a valid indicator, or does political knowledge require more than "bits of information"?

3. Kuklinski, et al. (2000) argue that "To be informed requires, first, that people have factual beliefs and, second, that those beliefs be accurate." What do they believe are the consequences of being *uninformed*? What about *misinformed*? Which is worse and why?

4. Kuklinski, et al. expect that people will "hold factual beliefs about public policy," but that "many will hold inaccurate ones and hold them confidently." Aside from the authors' example on welfare, can you think of any examples (e.g., Iraq and WMD)?

5. What happens when educators give citizens correct facts? Do policy preferences adjust accordingly?

ANXIETY AND EMOTION (Thursday, February 15)

1. As Brader (2005) tells us, emotional language is powerful when invoked in political advertising. There is a tendency, however, to see decision-making based on affect as bad—inferior, irrational, superficial, even destructive. Is this a fair criticism? Are decisions routed through the cognitive centers of our brains always better? Why or why not?

2. According to Huddy, et al. (2005), when it comes to managing the public's reaction to terrorism, the government faces quite a challenge. In order to secure support for their policies, leaders must make people aware of the threat without unduly scaring them. How does this conclusion square with the Bush administration's overall strategy in the war on terror? How might we apply the same logic to an issue like global warming?

SOCIAL IDENTITIES (Tuesday, February 20)

In a classic book, simply titled *Voting*, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) concluded that "a person thinks, politically, as he is socially. Social characteristics determine political preferences." In this class, we will consider two of those characteristics in detail: political partisanship and race.

1. Green, et al. (2002) argue that the "term *identification* is commonly used in two ways." One meaning suggests "affinity," the other "self-categorization." In a practical sense, what do these terms mean?

2. According to the authors, where does political partisanship fit in? Are citizens justified in thinking of themselves as Democrats or Republicans if they do not "vote like a partisan, or think like a partisan, or register as a partisan…"?

3. Green, et al. say that the distinctions they make "may seem like splitting hairs, but a number of important empirical insights grow out of them." What are they?

4. If "self-described partisans harbor genuine attachments to partisan groups," how influential is this likely to be on public opinion and political behavior?

5. According to Kinder and Winter (2001), why do the views of blacks and whites differ so markedly? They offer "four alternative and quite general ways that the racial divide in opinion might be understood." What are they?

6. Kinder and Winter argue that the differences in opinion between whites and blacks is "huge." For instance, "where as 89.2 percent of African Americans in 1992 supported the idea that the government in Washington should see to it that black people get fair treatment in jobs, just 48.7 percent of whites did so." Is this a function of group interest or, perhaps, self-interest? What role does "in-group solidarity" and/or "out-group resentment" play?

SELF-INTEREST (Thursday, February 22)

1. According to Brewer (2001), what, exactly, is the "Puff Daddy theory of presidential elections"? Are presidential elections "all about the Benjamins?"

2. What is "sociotropic voting"? What about "pocketbook voting"? When it comes to economic issues, do voters tend to think "prospectively" or "retrospectively"? Of these four variants, which combination occurs most frequently in presidential campaigns?

3. Erikson (1989) demonstrates a strong relationship between economic conditions and the presidential vote. What variables does he include in his equation? Are they sufficient?

4. If "the vote is determined almost entirely by the amount of prosperity that the incumbent party delivers" (evaluations of the candidates' personal qualities aside), why did models of economic voting misread the 2000 presidential election?

5. In what others ways might self-interest manifest itself in political attitudes and behavior? Can voters also be altruistic? Under what conditions?

THE NEWS MEDIA, Part 1 (Tuesday, February 27)

"As Walter Lippmann argued 70 years ago, our opinions and behavior are responses not to the world itself but to our perceptions of that world. It is the 'pictures in our heads' that shape our feelings and actions, and these pictures only imperfectly reflect the world that surrounds us" (Gilens, pp. 515-516).

Our goal today is to use the assigned reading to understand better the role that the media play in shaping (even altering) those perceptions.

1. Gilens begins with two important observations about race and poverty. What are they?

2. What methods does he use to study the issue?

3. What does he find? What are his conclusions?

4. Are you persuaded by his choice of methodology? Is it appropriate and fair? Can you think of a better approach?

5. Do you agree with the conclusions he draws from the evidence? Are there alternative explanations? Could people's misperception of race and poverty come from another source? Could the direction of causality be reversed?

6. If you believe Gilens, why do you think the media misrepresent the poor? Are their actions accidental or purposeful?

7. Why does it matter if average Americans misunderstand poverty? What are consequences, political and otherwise?

8. Like Gilens, Hetherington starts off with several simple observations. What are they?

9. What is his hypothesis?

10. Hetherington uses two important terms: "priming" and "framing." What do they mean?

11. In contrast to Gilens, what methodology does Hetherington choose?

12. Hetherington says that "coverage of the economy was almost exclusively negative in tone and content" in 1992. Does he provide enough evidence of this?

13. What are his conclusions and are you persuaded by them? Think about these questions: Are there any alternative explanations? Is 1992 a unique case? Is there a difference between "statistical significance" and practical significance? In the end, does he demonstrate a "liberal bias" in the media, or merely a bias toward controversy and negative news?

THE NEWS MEDIA, Part 2 (Thursday, March 1)

1. According to Zaller, the public's initial response to the Monica Lewinsky scandal was puzzling. Why? What happened?

2. Zaller considers several different explanations for the unusual pattern he observes? What are they?

3. In the end, Zaller believes that the Lewinsky scandal represented the triumph of "political substance" over the antics of "media politics." What does he mean when he uses those terms?

4. Do you find his argument credible? Are there any other (competing) explanations?

5. In Kull, Ramsay and Lewis' article on public opinion and the Iraq War, on what specific "misperceptions" do they focus? There are three. Can you name them?

6. According to the evidence they present, how common were these "misperceptions"?

7. How to these "misperceptions" relate to support for the war in Iraq?

8. According to the authors, where do these "misperceptions" come from? From the Bush administration's own false statements? From the news media? If the latter, from which news outlet(s), in particular? Is there a liberal/conservative bias here? Why or why not?

9. How persuaded are you by their results? As in Zaller's case, are there any alternative explanations here for the turnaround in public opinion once the war in Iraq began? (Hint: There are many! Can you spot them?)

10. "To some extent," say the authors, "this period [in the aftermath of 9/11] may be regarded as unique." Is it? How does this compare to the other cases we have discussed so far - Gilens on race and poverty, Hetherington on the 1992 economy, Zaller on the Lewinsky scandal? What powers of persuasion does the media possess? What limitations are imposed on that power?

THE NATURE OF MASS BELIEF SYSTEMS (Thursday, March 8)

1. Some of the material in Chapter 3 of Erikson and Tedin will sound familiar, reinforcing our previous discussions on political knowledge, for instance. Pay particular attention here to what they call "opinion consistency." Now that we have explored what public opinion is, and how attitudes form, we will tackle the matter of how attitudes are organized (or, in some cases, disorganized). Should we expect attitudes to remain stable, across issues and even over time? If so, what serves as the central anchor, or binding agent? For years, scholars assumed (read: hoped) that ideology would serve that purpose, whereby our commitment to liberal or conservative principles would provide the framework on which would base our opinions on issues as diverse as welfare reform, the environment, abortion, and the budget deficit. According to Erikson and Tedin's review of the literature, how likely is this?

2. Both of the remaining articles—Peffley and Hurwitz (1985) and Prothro and Grigg (1960) explore attitude constraint in greater detail. Rather than looking at consistency across issues (what we might call "horizontal constraint"), they examine consistency between

abstract principles and the application of those principles to specific situations (think of this as "vertical constraint"). Which do you think is more important and why?

3. According to Peffley and Hurwitz (1985), are citizens capable of abstract ideological thought? While the models they use are complex, focus on Figures 1 and 2, which provide a nice graphical representation of their work. Keep in mind, higher numbers indicate more consistency.

4. Prothro and Grigg (1960) explore the same notion of constraint, but they test a different anchor, or organizing principle. Instead of ideology, what is it?

5. In Prothro and Grigg's piece, what "abstract principles" and "specific principles" do they examine? Are these appropriate choices?

6. What do Prothro and Grigg (1960) find? Is there consensus on democratic principles? What about on the application of those principles to specific situations? What happens to cause consensus to break down? How do we explain it? Is this just another case of ambivalence (as per Hochschild)?

7. In what ways are the conclusions reached by Peffley and Hurwitz (1985) and Prothro and Griff (1960) similar? In what ways are they different?

8. We often use measures of opinion consistency (or "constraint") as a standard for judging the political competence and sophistication of the public? Is this a fair? Why or why not? Think about why attitude constraint matter. Should we really prefer citizens—even leaders—who have rigid and highly consistent beliefs? Doesn't flexibility in politics matter too?

CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS (Tuesday, March 20)

1. If most people fail to structure their beliefs ideologically, what is left? How well do "core beliefs," like those used by Feldman, work?

2. Does Feldman's model presume too much effort, too much information? He argues that "It should not require a high degree of political sophistication for people to absorb the political norms of society when they are so ingrained in the political and social life of the nation" (p. 418). Do you agree?

3. What three "core beliefs" does Feldman examine? Describe them. Does that change your answer to #2 above? Are his conclusions sensible?

4. Based on our reading of Feldman (as well as Prothro and Grigg), let's take our understanding of core democratic values, in all its permutations, out for a spin. "Core" suggests something fundamental, solid, stable. What do Davis and Silver find? Is that the case with the civil liberties issues they examine within the context of 9/11? What implication does their work have for our understanding of attitude constraint?

5. Finally, if we come to understand the importance of a shared consensus on core democratic values, we should also consider how those values are absorbed. Litt's earlier study of civic education in Boston told us that schools play a vital role in the socialization of young citizens. Murphy's piece demonstrates just how controversial that can be. He believes that "the attempt to inculcate civic values in our schools is at best ineffective and often undermines the intrinsic moral purpose of schooling." Do you agree or

disagree? Why? Should schools try to make us "good citizens." If not. if schools were to follow his advice and "avoid civic education altogether," what would happen? Where and how would those "core democratic values" (so central to the other works we read) be transmitted?

ONE STATE, TWO STATE, RED STATE, BLUE STATE (Tuesday, March 27)

1. In looking at a series of recent elections, Barone (2001) says that if we round off the results, we see "essentially the same number over and over" again. In "The 49 Percent Nation," we seem to be evenly divided down the middle, into what pundits have called "Red" states and "Blue" states. On what basis do these states differ?

2. According to Barone, is the country (gradually) becoming more "Red" or more "Blue"? Do you agree or disagree with the logic behind that conclusion? Why?

3. As Fiorina (2006) points out, even if voters in the U.S. are evenly divided, it need not mean that they are deeply divided, despite the popularity of that claim in the news media. When compared to Barone's work, he offers a "contrary thesis." What is it? Are claims of a culture war "simple exaggeration" and "sheer nonsense"? On what misperceptions of American elections does he believe it is based?

4. On the subject of "closely and deeply divided" versus "closely but not deeply divided" (see Figure 2.1 on page 13), what difference does it make?

5. Let's explore the consequences of polarization on one issue in greater detail. Dunlap and McCright (2008) argue that attitudes towards climate change are shaped increasingly by ideology and partisanship. With that in mind, how should environmental activists communicate the risks of climate change to the lay public, and to Republicans in particular? There is a natural temptation to think that more and better communication is required—that the right metaphor, the right turn of phrase, or the right issue "frame" might make a difference—but can it?

WHAT MOVES PUBLIC OPINION? (Thursday, March 29)

Americans are a stubborn lot. As we have seen so far this term, people tend to hold onto their beliefs tenaciously, even when those beliefs are based on inaccurate information. Still, public opinion does move. Change is sometimes swift, but more often slow; sometimes unexpected, but usually explicable. Our task in this class is to reach a better understanding of how and why public opinion changes over time.

1. According to Page and Shapiro (1992), how stable are the policy preferences of the American public? When change does occur, under what conditions is it gradual? When is it likely to be abrupt? Is change "capricious"?

2. According to Stimson (1999), what cycles, waves, and trends in public opinion occur over time? Think about the variety of subjects we have covered so far—the war in Iraq, the environment, the Lewinsky scandal, etc. Is the trajectory for each over time similar or different? Why?

3. In response to *what* does public opinion change--to events, experts, politicians, interest groups, the news media, etc?

4. Rally effects are a particularly interesting form of opinion change. What, exactly, is a "rally"? According to Hetherington and Nelson (2003), what makes the rally following 9/11 distinctive? What explains its duration and (given what we know now) its eventual collapse? What have the political consequences been?

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION (Tuesday, April 3)

1. In "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," how does Putnam in define "social capital"? From his perspective, why is it so important?

2. Putnam's "bowling alone" metaphor has become popular in the press. What does it mean?

3. What evidence does Putnam cite when describing the erosion of social capital in the United States over the last few decades? What is his prime culprit?

4. Putnam's article contains all of the elements of a good mystery. Are you persuaded by Putnam's evidence? Why or why not?

5. Why, according to Samuelson, is the "Bowling Alone" phenomenon bunk? What counter evidence does he cite?

6. On balance, which argument is more persuasive? For instance, do Putnam's data accurately measure participation? Does it square with other evidence of civic engagement from the same period of time(e.g., the women's rights movement, Civil Rights, consumer movement, environmental movement-all of which were grassroots in nature)?

7. Is Putnam's baseline fair? For example, we might say that the 1940s and 1950s were a unique time period. We might ask why that group was so much more civic in its orientation, not why later groups are not.

8. Does Putnam romanticize the 1950s as a "golden age"? Think of the strife, division and racial prejudice of that era.

9. What can the campaigns of Howard Dean and Barack Obama tell us about "social capital"? Can the internet create new, powerful connections between people—different connections (e.g., more global, less local)—but real connections nevertheless? Or, does as Hampton and his colleagues (2014) fear, does the rise of social media stifle debate and harm the diversity of opinion in the public sphere?

UNDERSTANDING TRENDS IN VOTER TURNOUT (Thursday, April 5)

The decline in voter turnout is, as today's reading reminds us, "the most important, most familiar, most analyzed, and most conjectured trend in recent American political history." Let's consider two very different views on the matter:

1. According to Patterson (2002), why have voters "vanished"? What reasons does he offer? Are they convincing?

2. What is McDonald and Popkin's (2001) response to this debate? Why do they believe that it is an "illusion"?

3. How important is this debate? Does low voter turnout *really* matter? If so, how?

GETTING OUT THE VOTE (Tuesday, April 10)

In discussing voter turnout last class, we said there were three possible responses to the issue: A) Do nothing because what seem to be low rates of voter turnout are in actuality higher. The turnout "problem" is merely a product of measuring turnout incorrectly; B) Do nothing because it is not desirable to increase turnout if that means encouraging the participation of the uneducated and ill-informed; and C) Do something. In this class, we will tackle the full range of the "do something" option.

1. Marshall Ganz discusses a policy known as "Motor Voter." What is it? According to the author, how well has it worked in increasing turnout? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?

2. Meirick and Wackman come at the problem from a completely different direction. What is Kids Voting USA? Again, according to the authors, how well does the program work? Are you convinced by their findings? Why or why not?

3. In contrast to the first two pieces, what approach do Gerber and Green take? What strategy for increasing turnout do they investigate? What methodology do they use? Do you find the evidence they cite compelling?

4. Finally, think about the logic that underlies each of these proposals. What do they identify as the root cause of the problem? For instance, in the eyes of Motor Voter proponents, why is turnout low? For those who support programs like Kids Voting USA, what would they likely believe? How about campaigns that emphasize canvassing? From their perspective, why don't people vote? Given our understanding of the issue, are these solutions well suited to the problem? Which is most likely to work and why?

MODELS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR (Thursday, April 12)

1. In "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," Carmines and Stimson say that "there are two theoretically different and empirically identifiable types." What, exactly, are "hard" issues? What are "easy" issues? In the world of politics today, can you think of any examples?

2. If issue voting occurs rarely, is that because of the "inherent limitations of the citizen/voter" or it is because of the "inadequacies of choice offered by the political system"? What role, if any, might the media play here?

3. If Carmines and Stimson are right when they suggest that easy-issue voting occurs in "waves or surges," how might political campaigns capitalize? How might they appeal to the easy-issue voter? What risk is there in doing so?

4. Carmines and Stimson argue that "the study of issue voting is infused with normative considerations." Voters who cast ballots based on their own personal policy preferences relative to those of party candidates are often assumed to make decisions that are rational, wise and sophisticated. What do the authors believe? Should we "observe issue voting and infer sophistication"? Why or why not?

5. In "The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election: Can Retrospective Voting be Saved," Fiorina, Abrams and Pope discuss Gore's loss within the context of political science theories that insist that election outcomes depend on "fundamentals," such as peace and prosperity (remember, Zaller pointed to the same in his article on the Lewinsky scandal). What do they think is the major cause of Gore's defeat? Consider their hypotheses and the evidence they cite in each case carefully.

6. How might we apply Fiorina, et al's work to the 2012 presidential election? Did Romney lose to Obama for the same reasons that Gore lost to Bush?

ELECTIONS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POPULAR CONTROL (Tuesday, April 17)

In this class we will talk about the political consequences of voter ignorance. As Lau and Redlawsk point out: "The classic texts of democratic theory. assume that for a democracy to function properly the average citizen should be interested in, pay attention to, discuss, and actively participate in politics.. Five decades of behavior research in political science have left no doubt, however, that only a tiny minority of the citizens in any democracy actually live up to these ideals."

In short, based on so much of what we have read this term, we know that most citizens are relatively uniformed about politics-they fail the conditions of Erikson and Tedin's "rational-activist model," and often quite miserably-but to what extent does it matter?

Some scholars insist that is inconsequential for two reasons:

A) Poorly informed voters can make efficient use of relevant cues and cognitive short-cuts;

B) Individual errors tend to cancel out when votes are aggregated;

In order to explore to these hypotheses, each of today's reading assignments attempt to compare real and ideal situations: how people "actually" vote to how they "might" vote when fully informed. Notice first how this is similar to the efforts made by Fishkin and Luskin with "deliberative democracy," then move on to consider these questions:

1. According to Lau and Redlawsk, what does the term "voting correctly" mean?

2. Lau and Redlawsk pose an interesting question: "What if people can make reasonably good decisions, most of the time, without all the motivation and attention and knowledge required by classic theory?" This sounds too good to be true, right? Is it? "Quite simply," they write, "human beings have adaptively developed a large series of cognitive heuristics and shortcuts that allow they to make 'pretty good' judgments most of the time." This perspective encourages us to judge the outcome (that is, the decision itself), not just the perceived quality of the process we use to get there. So, what exactly are these heuristics and shortcuts? How do they work?

3. Describe the experiment the authors use. How did it work? What was the goal?

4. What do you think of their experimental design? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Should we ask respondents if they think they voted "correctly"? Will respondents be reluctant to admit they made a mistake? How do the authors adjust for this? What is their "second measure" of correct voting?

5. According to the authors' results, what percentage of people voted "correctly," both in their experiment and in their extension of the model to the 1972 through 1988 presidential elections? Are the numbers high or low? Or, to put it another way, are they high enough?

6. Moving on to Bartels, he says that the "electorate as a whole deviates in significant and politically consequential ways from the projected behavior of a 'fully informed' electorate." How so? Other things being equal, who are relatively uninformed voters more likely to support?

7. Why do Bartels' results differ from those of Lau and Redlawsk? Could this be a matter of looking at a glass as half-full rather than half-empty?

8. Bartels considers the magic of statistical aggregation at some length. The argument itself is based on Condorcet's theorem (Remember, it proves mathematically that the probability of a correct majority vote in a group of modestly well-informed individuals may increase substantially as the size of the group increases). According to Bartels, the "practical difficulty with Condorcet's argument is that it only works to the extent that individual errors are truly 'random'-with an expected value of zero and no correlation across voters." How likely is this? What conditions during a political campaign are likely to violate those assumptions?

THE INTERPLAY OF PUBLIC OPINION AND PUBLIC POLICY (Thursday, April 19)

Certainly, public opinion can influence public policy through the circuitous route offered by elections. We might assume that informed voters cast ballots for those candidates most proximate to their own policy preferences, and that representatives act on those preferences sincerely once in office. In reality, of course, few of us are informed enough to act with much assurance on matters of policy, but as our previous reading demonstrates, we often find creative ways to vote "correctly" much of the time nevertheless.

What, then, are we to make of the second half of our simple democratic theory? How responsive is government to the preferences of its citizens? These articles tackle both the empirical and the normative sides of this debate:

1. According to Page and Shapiro, their approach to measuring the effects of public opinion on policy "employs a macrolevel aggregate design" based on "congruence." What does this mean? How do they identify their cases?

2. What do they find? In how many cases was there a "congruent change in opinion and policy"? What about "noncongruent change," or even "no change" at all? Are you surprised by this result?

3. According to the authors, what factors seem to explain—or even predict—the extent of congruence that appears? Does the type of policy issue matter (e.g., foreign or domestic)? What about the ideological direction of change? Does that matter?

4. Can you think of any recent examples of congruent and incongruent changes in policy? Are those cases consistent with the authors' results?

5. As Page and Shapiro point out: "The mere observation of congruence between opinion and policy tells us little, of course, about which causes which." Under what conditions might a change in government policy precipitate a change in public attitudes?

6. While Page and Shapiro examine whether public opinion DOES influence policy, Weisberg questions whether it SHOULD. Does he believe that polling methodology is scientific enough to provide "sound policy counsel"? Is the average citizen wise enough? What do you believe? As Weisberg ask: "Where do we go from here"?

MANIPULATING OPINION (Tuesday, April 24)

In this class, we will continue to discuss the reciprocal link between public opinion and public policy, this time by focusing directly on the role that politicians play.

1. Syndicated newspaper columnist Maureen Dowd once wrote that politicians were "prisoners of polling." Indeed, with Dick Morris' memoirs of the Clinton years in mind, she said: "polling has turned leaders into followers. There will never such a thing as greatness with a three-to-five point margin of error." Criticism such as Dowd's is commonplace today. There is a pervasive belief that politicians pander. What does that term mean? How does that word characterize the relationship between presidents and the polls?

2. According to Michael Barone, how do politicians use polls? How has this changed over time? Does his brief and somewhat anecdotal argument confirm or reject the image of the "pandering politician"?

3. Based on the title of their article, we know that Jacobs and Shapiro's goal is "Debunking the Pandering Politician Myth." Do they agree or disagree with Barone on the extent to which politicians use polls? Were you impressed or skeptical of the interviews they conducted?

4. According to Jacobs and Shapiro, "the primary purpose of tracking public opinion" is not to pander, "but to educate, lead, or otherwise influence public attitudes towards the President and his policies." From a normative standpoint, contrast this is the "pandering" model. Is there a difference between pandering politicians and those who are responsive to the needs of their constituents? If so, what is it? On the other hand, is there a difference between presidential leadership and outright manipulation? Where should that line be drawn?

5. Finally, consider the Luntz memo, which advises Republicans on how to "frame" environmental issues to their advantage. With Carmines and Stimpson in mind, is the attempt to sell the environment as a "hard" issue or an "easy" one? To what extent do you recognize the language used here in the current policy debate over global warming?

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT (Thursday, April 26)

On the subject of political consequences, it is time to broaden our scope beyond the relationship between public opinion and public policy on narrow issues, to an impact on the government system as a whole:

1. What is "political trust" and why, according to Hetherington, is it relevant? What, in particular, are the consequences of low trust?

2. In considering both assigned articles, what are the most plausible causes for the erosion of political trust in the United States? For an explanation, should we focus on policy "outputs" (e.g., satisfaction with the policies the government produces), or on a

"process" that violates our expectations about how the government should make decisions?

3. According to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, how do people want government to operate? Are their expectations both rational and reasonable?

4. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse believe that "process matters." How does this square with other evidence we have considered this term?

5. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse observe, Americans like to complain that "the government is out of touch with their needs, concerns and wants." Is this a fair criticism? Why or why not?

6. What, if anything, can politicians do to earn the public's trust? As a society, are we simply impossible to please?

7. Should citizens have a "healthy skepticism" of their government? Are there benefits to that?