

MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION - PSCI 342

Spring 2021

Tu & Th 2:00 – 3:20, via Zoom

Draft Syllabus – To Be Revised

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course we examine the news media and public opinion, two of the main dynamic forces in American politics, and explore the many critical interactions between news media practices and content, and public opinion formation and change. The media-public opinion interaction is a complex two-way street, and while we focus on the effects of the news media on mass opinion, we will also explore ways in which citizens influence the media – and create media – and other major political actors, and public policy. We read and discuss the best research on news media and public opinion, evaluate how well the theories and models of this research describe the increasingly complex and controversial relationships of media and opinion.

The course is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on public opinion – how to define it, how to measure it (including polls/surveys), and some of the fundamental concepts scholars employ to understand public (or “mass”) opinion, and their research findings. In the second section we examine the news media’s methods of selecting, gathering, and disseminating news, government policies and other pressures and restrictions on the media, and the news content that results. The third section builds on the first two to explore how the media and public opinion interact, focusing on the process of media influence, the different circumstances under which media can influence opinion, and the ways in which the media link or fail to link citizens to politics, political leaders, and policymaking.

In this course we study theories and concepts about the roles of media and public opinion in a democratic society, as well as the evidence used by social scientists to evaluate those theories and concepts. Students must learn and understand the theories and concepts, understand how the evidence relates to those theories and concepts, and learn to apply the theories and concepts to their own use and analysis of news media.

READINGS: There is one textbook we may use in this course. I will determine this by the start of week 3 of the course and let you know what, if any book we’ll use, and how to obtain it.

All other readings for the course will be available on Moodle, and will be listed individually in the “Course Topics and Readings” section below.

We all should be regular and critically aware consumers of news media and media coverage relating to public opinion. To do this, keep up with news coverage in at least one major newspaper on a daily basis. The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are two of the best in news coverage and have semi-free websites (www.nytimes.com, www.washingtonpost.com) and their own public opinion surveys (full disclosure: I was the polling analyst for the *Post* during the 2004 election campaign). The *Wall Street Journal* is also a good news source, but has less political news and is only free on links through the Mansfield Library website.

Other sources of news provide a useful contrast with newspapers and are important to a fuller understanding of media, but are less timely or less thorough. These include weekly news magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek*; national news on tv networks such as CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC and PBS (“News Hour”); or public radio news (on KUFM, 89.1). In addition, TV public affairs programs such as “Washington Week,” or “Meet the Press” are good ways to observe how journalists look at politics and how political leaders try to present their views in ways that appeal to the public. Keep up with these sources as often as possible, and focus on the national and state news coverage. The Kaimin, Missoulian and local tv news do not have enough coverage of national political news to be very useful in this regard, but provide good examples of local news coverage.

GRADES AND REQUIREMENTS: Because the subject matter of this course is varied, the assignments will be as well. Keeping up with the course readings, daily attendance, and participation are essential. The class lectures and discussions will cover material not in the course readings, and vice-versa. All lecture and reading material will potentially be on the exams. When events provide an opportunity, we will explore current news coverage and public opinion using supplemental readings not currently on the syllabus.

Written reading reflections & Class Participation Combined: To get the most out of this class and the readings, and do well on the exams, you will need to keep up with the assigned readings. There will be a discussion Forum on Moodle for your questions, comments, and insights on the readings. In addition, in-class participation is important to understanding this material, so contributing to class discussion with insights, comments and questions on the readings and topics is essential. Asking questions is encouraged as part of discussion, so if you have questions about the readings or discussions, you should ask! The combination of contributing frequently and intelligently to class discussions and/or Moodle discussion Forums counts 10% toward the course grade: if you participate at least once per week in with a thoughtful comment or question in class discussion or posted on the Moodle Forum, you will earn the full 10% participation points.

Short Papers: There will be two short analysis papers, worth 10% each.

* The first paper – the focus will be on applying the criteria for determining the quality of a public opinion survey to a survey presented in the news media.

* The second short paper is about political socialization, in which you will apply the concepts concerning influences on opinion formation to your own experiences.

Two exams: a midterm and a final. The final will be comprehensive but weighted toward the material in the second half of the course. Both exams will cover both material covered in class and the readings.

A research paper of 6-8 pages in length that will provide you an opportunity to do an original research project focusing on a topic you develop - a news media content analysis or an analysis of public opinion data. The specific requirements of the paper will be provided later in the semester.

GRADES: Grades will be calculated according to the following percentages:

A = 93-100	B+ = 87-89.9	C+ = 77-79.9	D+ = 67-69.9	below 60=F
A- = 90-92.9	B = 83-86.9	C = 73-76.9	D = 63-66.9	
	B- = 80-82.9	C- = 70-72.9	D- = 60-62.9	

Short paper analyzing public opinion survey quality	10%
Short paper on political socialization	10%
Participation in discussion & Written Reading Reflections	10%
Midterm exam	20% of grade
Research paper (6-8 pages)	30% of grade
Final exam	20% of grade

The midterm and final exams, and the research paper must all be completed and turned in on time in order to pass this course.

PSCI 400: Undergraduate students taking the 1-credit PSCI 400 Advanced Writing course will write a 2-page research proposal and complete a draft of the research paper, both of which I will provide comments on. Based on the draft comments students will revise the paper into final form. The final version of the paper will be 8-10 pages instead of 6-8, and graded on writing clarity, organization, and revisions of the first draft, as well as content. First drafts will be due one week before the paper due date for the rest of the class.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to academic penalties by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. You must be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, online at <http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.php>

The University of Montana Student Conduct Code prohibits plagiarism, which is “representing another person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own” and other forms of academic misconduct. These are serious academic violations that can result in penalties up to suspension or expulsion from the University.

I take academic honesty very seriously, and do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of dishonesty. Read Section V, “Academic Conduct” on pp. 5-12 of the Student Conduct Code above.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

CLASS COURTESY:

In order to have a pleasant and effective learning environment in a class this size on Zoom, we need to observe a few basic courtesies. Please arrive in our Zoom class on time; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class.

Please mute your Zoom audio unless you are asking a question, and when you’re “unmuted” to talk, please turn off cell phones and all other audio devices so we can hear you better. Please stay focused on class during the class period, so we’re not distracted by your dog catching a Frisbee in your apartment! If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise your hand on Zoom (the yellow hand icon) or otherwise signal me -- I will look for raised hands, so that we can have more of an interactive discussion during class. **We can all contribute to creating a positive and effective learning environment in our class.**

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:

You can drop on Cyberbear through February 1, and then from February 2 to March 18 (5 pm) using a drop form signed by me and your advisor. From March 19 – April 23 (5 pm), you must go through the more difficult “late drop” petition process. I will sign late drop petitions until April 16, and after that only if necessitated by accident, illness, or family/personal emergency as stated in the Drop policy here:

<https://www.umt.edu/registrar/students/drop-add/default.php> Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the official University policy are met – this policy and other official UM academic policies are at <https://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures>

DSS STUDENTS:

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations on exams, papers, notes or other course requirements should contact me, and must provide me with a copy of, your DSS letter of accommodations as soon as you can. The DSS office is in Lommasson Center 154, their website is <https://www.umt.edu/disability-services/> .

E-MAIL AND MOODLE:

Every registered UM student has an official UM e-mail account, and students registered for this course have a Moodle course account. I may use your official UM e-mail to send you important announcements, and I will post course readings, exam and paper grades on Moodle. At <https://umt.teamdynamix.com/TDClient/Home/> there are instructions on how to access your UM e-mail and Moodle accounts.

GRADUATE STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

Graduate students taking this course must complete additional graduate-level readings and a written analysis for each course topic as specified by the instructor, and must complete a 20-25 page research paper consisting of a research design and hypothesis, original coding and analysis of multiple criteria of news content, an extensive literature review, and an analysis that synthesizes the three components.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

NOTE: TOPICS, READINGS, and DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE BY INSTRUCTOR

1/12 - 14 Introduction: What are News Media and Public Opinion, and Why Study Them?

1/14 - 21 Defining Public Opinion, the News Media, and Their Roles in a Democracy

1. Glynn et al., "Meanings of Public Opinion" Chapter 1 in *Public Opinion*, 3rd ed., pp. 3-25.
2. Herbst, "Techniques of Opinion Expression and Measurement," Chapter 3 in *Numbered Voices*, pp. 43-68.
3. Ginsberg, "How Polling Transforms Public Opinion" in *The Captive Public*, pp. 272-293.

*** 1/21 - THURSDAY - SHORT PAPER ON FORMS OF OPINION EXPRESSION DUE IN CLASS**

1/26 – 2/4 Nuts and Bolts of Understanding Public Opinion Surveys

1. Erikson and Tedin, "Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion," Chapter 2 in *American Public Opinion*, 9th ed., pp. 23-50.
2. Asher, "Wording and Context of Questions," (Chapter 3, pp. 44-61) in *Polling and the Public*, 5th edition.
3. Pew Research Center, "Understanding the 2020 Election Poll Performance."

***2/4 - THURSDAY - SHORT PAPER ON MEDIA SURVEY QUALITY DUE IN CLASS**

2/9 – 16 Sources of Individual Opinion I: Formation and Development

1. Erikson and Tedin, "Political Learning and Political Socialization," Chapter 5 in *American Public Opinion*, 9th ed., pp. 112-141.
2. Clawson, "Parental Transmission of Political Attitudes During Adolescence," pp. 59-63

*** 2/18 – THURSDAY - SHORT PAPER ON POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION DUE IN CLASS**

2/16 – 25 Sources of Individual Opinion Part II: How People Gain and Organization Their Opinions

1. Zaller, "How Citizens Acquire Information." Chapter 3 in *Nature and Origins of Public Opinion*, pp. 40-52.
2. Erikson and Tedin, "Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion Holding," Chapter 3 in *American Public Opinion*, 6th ed., pp. 51-80.
3. Gilens, "Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance." 2019. Chapter 2 in *New Directions in Public Opinion*, ed. Adam Berinsky.

3/2 – 3/11 Dimensions of Political Polarization in the Public

1. Iyengar, "Affective Polarization or Hostility across the Party Divide: An Overview." 2019.
2. Federico, "Ideology and Public Opinion." 2019.
3. Muste, "Reframing Polarization: Social Groups and "Culture Wars." 2014.
4. Hetherington, "Worldview Politics"

MARCH 4 – UM STUDENT BREAK – NO CLASSES!

3/11 - THURSDAY - MIDTERM EXAM (TENTATIVE DATE: MAY BE CHANGED)

MARCH 16 – UM STUDENT BREAK – NO CLASSES!

*** 3/18 - THURSDAY - RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS**

3/18 – 3/25 Identities and Issues – Immigration and Race

1. Tesler, “Racial Attitudes and American Politics” 2019
2. Clawson, “Changing Roles for Group Identities in Issue Opinions” (Roots of Public Opinion: The Central Role of Groups) *forthcoming*
3. Schildkraut, “Ambivalence in American Public Opinion about Immigration.” 2019

3/30 – 4/1 Political Polarization II – Media, Sorting, and (Mis)Perception

- Levendusky, “Partisan Media Exposure and Attitudes Toward the Opposition. 2013. *Political Communication*, 30:4, 565-581
- Mason, 2015. “I Disrespectfully Agree: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59:128–45 (or “A Brief History of Social Sorting”)
- Levendusky and Malhotra. 2016. “Misperceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80:378–91.
- Baum and Young, “The ‘Daily Them’: Hybridity, Political Polarization and Presidential Leadership in a Digital Media Age.”

4/6 – 4/8 Political Leaders, Information Sources and Public Opinion - Media Influence on Learning, Persuasion and Other Effects

1. Jerit, “How People Learn About Politics: Navigating the Information Environment.” 2019
2. Iyengar, “News and Public Opinion,” chapter 8 in *MPCG*, pp. 229-271.
3. Skim: Iyengar, “Going Public: Governing Through the Media,” chapter 7 in *MPCG*, pp. 195-228.
4. Iyengar, “The Consequences of Going Public,” chapter 10 in *MPCG*, pp. 306-333.

4/13 – 4/15 Media Old and New: Purpose, Form, Selection, and Content

1. Iyengar, “The Media Marketplace: Where Americans Get The News,” chapter 3 in *MPCG*, pp. 50-91.
2. Iyengar, “Reporters, Official Sources, and the Decline of Adversarial Journalism,” chapter 4 in *MPCG*, pp. 92-112.
3. Dunaway, et al. “The Move to Mobile: What’s the Impact on Citizen News Attention?”
4. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “2020 Media Usage and Credibility Study,” excerpts.

*** 4/15 – THURSDAY - RESEARCH PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

4/20 – 22 The Present and Future of Information Media & Public Opinion

1. Iyengar, “New Media, New Forms of Campaigning” chapter 5 in *MPCG*, pp. 113-148.
2. Ridout and Fowler, “Fake News: What Is the Influence of Fabricated Stories and Efforts to Undermine Media Credibility?” in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2018.
3. Project for Excellence in Journalism, “The State of the News Media 2006.”
4. Baum, “How Soft News Brings Policy Issues to the Inattentive Public.”

*** 4/26 – MONDAY - FINAL EXAM, 1:10 – 3:10 – TBD – or takehome exam**