

PUBLIC OPINION
POLSCI 4PO3
Winter 2022, Term 2

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Course Description

The expression of public opinion is a fundamental component of democratic governance. This course will explore the forces that shape public opinion, seek to understand the interplay between public opinion and government policy, and critically analyze how media and other elite actors shape social and political attitudes.

In addition to theoretical perspectives, students will also be introduced to practical aspects of conducting public opinion research, such as survey development, analysis, and best practices associated with presenting results.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Identify sources of attitudes on public opinion topics
- Design survey questionnaires
- Analyze, summarize and present public opinion survey data
- Be knowledgeable about trends in public opinion on various social issues and election outcomes
- Understand the connection between public opinion and democratic governance

Required Materials and Texts

- Fowler, Floyd. 2013. *Survey Research Methods 5th Edition*. Center for Survey Research, University of Massachusetts. Boston.
 - This textbook is available in paperback and electronic book. Copies can be purchased from McMaster Bookstore, or directly through Sage: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/book/survey-research-methods-4>
- Other readings are available via McMaster University Library, accessible online, or posted to course website, as indicated in weekly course schedule.

Class Format

This course will be delivered in-person. If the COVID-19 pandemic forces a return to online learning, the course will continue to be delivered synchronously during regularly scheduled class times utilizing Zoom.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Workshop # 1: Focus Group Activity (5%)
2. Workshop # 2: Coding Survey Results (5%)
3. Midterm Test (20%)
4. News Style Article (20%)
5. Report: Tracing Public Opinion (30%)
6. Final Test (20%)

Course Evaluation – Details

Workshop # 1: Focus Group Activity (5%), Due February 9, 2021

Working in groups, students will conduct a focus group to develop survey questions. An annotated questionnaire that highlights questionnaire revisions will be submitted for evaluation. The workshop will take place during class time.

Workshop # 2: Coding Survey Results (5%), Due February 16, 2021

Working in groups, students will code open-ended survey responses. Students will collaborate to develop a coding scheme and reach consensus on how to handle troublesome responses. An annotated coding justification will be submitted for evaluation. This workshop will take place during class time.

Midterm Test (20%), Due February 16, 2021

Students will write a midterm at the beginning of class on February 16, 2021. This test will be comprised of short-answer style questions, and last 60 minutes in length. The test will cover reading and lecture material up until the end of February 9, 2021.

News Style Article (20%), Due March 9, 2021

Students will be provided with survey data. Students will analyze the data and develop a news style article to present results. Further details will be discussed in class.

Report: Tracing Public Opinion (30%), Due March 30, 2021

Students will prepare a research report that traces the evolution of public opinion on a particular election, or social issue of their choosing. Further details will be discussed in class.

Final Test (20%), Registrar Scheduled

Students will write a final exam during a time slot scheduled by the Registrar. This two-hour test will be comprised of short-answer and essay style questions. While the test will cover material from the start of the term, it will primarily focus on content covered after the midterm test.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Jan 12) Overview and Introduction

Topic: Course Overview and Introduction to Public Opinion

- Course Text Chapter 1
- Herbst, Susan. 2011. "The History and Meaning of Public Opinion" pp. 19-31 in *New Directions in Public Opinion* edited by Adam Berinsky. Taylor & Francis Group. [E-book available via McMaster Library]

- Converse, Phillip. 1987. "Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 51: S12-S24. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]

Week 2 (Jan 19) Who and How Do You Ask?

Topic: Who Do You Ask? How Do You Ask?

- Course Text Chapters 2 – 4
- Kennedy, Courtney et al., 2020. "Assessing the Risks to Online Polls From Bogus Respondents" Pew Research Center [Article available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2020/02/18/assessing-the-risks-to-online-polls-from-bogus-respondents/>]

Week 3 (Jan 26) What Do You Ask?

Topic: What Do You Ask? Developing Questionnaires

- Course Text Chapters 5 – 7
- Hughes, Adam and Bradley Jones. 2019. "'Good jobs' vs. 'jobs': Survey experiments can measure the effects of question wording – and more" Pew Research Center [Article available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/29/good-jobs-vs-jobs-survey-experiments-can-measure-the-effects-of-question-wording-and-more/>]

Week 4 (Feb 2) Workshop #1

Topic: Workshop # 1: Focus Group Activity

- Course Text Chapters 8 & 11

Week 5 (Feb 9) Analyzing and Reporting / Workshop #2

Topic: Analyzing and Reporting Results

Workshop # 2: Coding Survey Results

- Course Text Chapters 9, 10 & 12
- de Vaus, D. 1996. "Coding" pages 233-248 in *Surveys in Social Research 4th Edition* UCL Press. [Reading available via course website]

Week 6 (Feb 16) Midterm and Political Attitudes

Topic: Midterm and Political Attitudes

Readings (readings assigned for Week 6 will not be on the midterm):

- Zaller, J. and S. Feldman, S. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences" *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579–616. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]
- Shiraev, Eric and Richard Sobel. 2006. *People and Their Opinions: Thinking Critically about Public Opinion*. Pearson Longman. [E-book available via McMaster Library]
 - Chapter 4: "Attitudes and Opinions"
 - Chapter 5: "Political Socialization"

Week 7 (Feb 23) Mid-term recess, NO CLASS

Week 8 (Mar 2) Whose Opinion?

Topic: Whose Opinion? Bias in Public Opinion Research

- Wojcik, Stefan and Adam Hughes. 2019. "Sizing up Twitter Users." Pew Research Center. [Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>]
- Clawson, Rosalee and Zoe Oxley. 2020. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Sage.
 - Chapter 7: "Roots of Public Opinion: The Central Role of Groups [Reading available via course website]
- Alford, John and John Hibbing. 2010. *Understanding Public Opinion 3rd Edition*, edited by Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox. CQ Press
 - Chapter Three: "The Ultimate Source of Political Opinions: Genes and the Environment" [Reading available via course website]
- Liliach, Nir and Scott McClurg. 2015. "How Institutions Affect Gender Gaps in Public Opinion Expression" *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 79(2): 544–567. [Reading available via course website]

Week 9 (Mar 9) The Role of Elites

Topic: The Role of Elites: Media and Other "Influencers"

- Feldman, Lauren. 2011. "The Opinion Factor: The Effects of Opinionated News on Information Processing and Attitude Change" *Political Communication* 28:2: 163-181. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]
- Druckman, J. N. and K.R. Nelson. 2003. "Framing and Deliberation: How Citizens' Conversations Limit Elite Influence." *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(4): 729–745. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]
- Merkley, E. et al. 2020. "A Rare Moment of Cross-Partisan Consensus: Elite and Public Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in

Canada". *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53(2): 311-318. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]

- Carmichael, J. T. and R.J. Brulle. 2017. "Elite cues, media coverage, and public concern: an integrated path analysis of public opinion on climate change, 2001–2013". *Environmental Politics* 26(2): 232-252. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]

Week 10 (Mar 16) Public Opinion and Elections

Topic: Public Opinion and Elections

- Pickup, Mark. 2010. "Election Campaign Polls and Democracy in Canada: Examining the Evidence behind the Common Claims" pp 242-278 in *Voting Behaviour in Canada* edited by Cameron D. Anderson and Laura B. Stephenson. UBC Press. [Reading available via course website]
- Squire, Peverill. 1988. "Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 52(1):125-133. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]
- Kennedy, C. et al. 2018. "An Evaluation of the 2016 Election Polls in the United States." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82(1):1-33 [Journal article available via McMaster Library]

Week 11 (Mar 23) Public Opinion and Public Policy

Topic: Public Opinion and Public Policy

- Erikson, Robert and Kent Tedin. 2007. "The Public and Its Elected Leaders" pp 296 – 324 in *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact*. Pearson Longman. [Reading available via course website]
- Page, Christopher. 2006. *The Roles of Public Opinion Research in Canadian Government*. University of Toronto Press.
 - Chapter Four: "Overview of the Uses of Opinion Research in the Policy Process" [Reading available via course website]
- Wlezien, C. and S. Soroka. 2012. "Political Institutions and the Opinion–Policy Link" *West European Politics* 35(6): 1407-1432. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]
- O'Connor, B. and S. Vucetic. 2010. "Another Mars-Venus Divide? Why Australia Said "Yes" and Canada Said "Non" to Involvement in the 2003 Iraq War. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64(5): 526–548. [Journal article available via McMaster Library]

Week 12 (Mar 30) Case Studies in Public Opinion I

Topic: Case Studies in Public Opinion

Research Report Mini Presentations

No Assigned Readings

Week 13 (Apr 6) Case Studies in Public Opinion II

Topic: Case Studies in Public Opinion

Research Report Mini Presentations

No Assigned Readings

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments are due in hard copy to the instructor at the beginning of class on the due date indicated.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Late assignments are due to the Department of Political Science's main office. Late assignments will be assessed a penalty of 5 percentage points per day. Assignments more than 5 days late will not be accepted.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Courses With an On-Line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be

taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.