

**Political Science 411**  
**PUBLIC OPINION & MEDIA**  
Spring 2023

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday; 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

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### **Course Description**

This course will examine public opinion, the mass media, and how they interact to shape contemporary American democracy. With public opinion, we will explore: where it comes from, how it is measured, what people think, how it influences government and vice-versa. We will likewise explore how the mass media covers modern politics, what biases are involved in this coverage, and how this interacts with public opinion to influence American elections and governance.

### **Readings**

*Public Opinion*, by Rosalee Clawson and Zoe Oxley, *4th Edition*  
*News: the Politics of Illusion*, *10<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by W. Lance Bennett  
*Why We're Polarized*, by Ezra Klein  
NCSU Libraries on-line reserves (\* indicates required readings; ^ indicates recommended)  
*The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*

### **Participation**

Class participation is an *integral* part of the class. At minimum, this means good attendance. Students are also expected to be attentive during lectures and to ask questions and contribute comments to class discussions. *You should come to each class having read the required assignment and prepared to discuss and/or write about the issues raised by the readings.* It is also your responsibility to remain abreast of current events in American politics, especially as they apply to public opinion and mass media. If you want to receive an A for participation, you need to 1) have excellent attendance; 2) contribute regularly to class discussions, and; 3) demonstrate knowledge of assigned readings and current events, especially during in-class writing assignments.

### **Requirements and Grading**

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- Midterm 20%
- Final Exam 25%
- Paper #1 15%
- Seminar paper 25%
- Participation 15%

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students should be able to...

- 1) Analyze news reports for a variety of biases
- 2) Apply knowledge of mass media to understanding current political context
- 3) Properly interpret public opinion poll questions and results summaries
- 4) Think critically about media portrayals of politics and public opinion
- 5) Explain the relationship between media, public opinion, and American democracy

## Paper Assignments

### Paper #1: Media Paper

Keep a journal of your news media consumption from January 29 – February 4, 2023. **Briefly**, record what you watched, listened to, read, etc., for information about politics and government and your reaction. Using *both the log and your typical long-term patterns*, describe your use—how much and how you use it— of various forms of media to obtain information politics and government. Some questions to think about: What news media sources do you generally rely upon and why? Do you seek out mainly information that supports your point of view and how do you react when dealing with information that appears to challenge your political beliefs? How do your political views shape the media sources you use—and how do you think these unique sources shape your views? How does the nature of and quality of news vary across your different sources? What sorts of bias and patterns do you see? Do you feel that the media you rely upon keep you sufficiently and objectively informed? Does this experience lead you to believe you should change your patterns in any particular ways? **Be sure to incorporate class material** in answering these questions. **6 Pages Maximum** (not including the attached journal/log). **Due February 9.** You are responsible for the full details on the assignment available at <http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS411/Paper1.htm>

### Paper #2: Seminar Paper: Issues in Public Opinion

Choose an issue of public opinion (at least tangentially related to politics) that interests you. What has been the course of public opinion on this issue over recent years/decades? Has it been fairly stable or variable—why? What accounts for changes in public opinion on this issue? Are there major differences in how particular demographic groups and political groups respond to this issue—why? Do you think citizens are truly knowledgeable about this issue? How well has this issue been measured (including the breadth and validity of common items)? Has opinion on this issue affected government action—or vice versa? How would you assess the interaction of media coverage and public opinion on this issue? **15 Pages Maximum. Due April 13.** Outline/preliminary biography due March 21. You are responsible for the full details on the assignment available at <http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS411/Paper2.htm>

### Late Policy

It is expected that exams will be taken and assignments turned in when they are scheduled on the syllabus. There will be a 20-point penalty for failure to take an exam at the required time and a 1/3 letter grade per day penalty for written assignments. If you miss an exam, the rescheduling must take place at the convenience of the instructor. Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. To avoid penalties you need to let the instructor know of valid, exigent circumstances before the assigned time.

### Academic Integrity

Do your own work. Plagiarism will be addressed in accord with University policy. The code of Student Conduct and associated policy (NCSU POL11.35.1) can be found here: <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01>. Academic Integrity also includes not representing work from AI as your own.

### Disability

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Resource Office and comply with relevant NCSU policies.

## Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

<b>January 10</b>	<b>Course Introduction</b> Klein, “How politics makes us stupid”* Hidden Brain, “The Double Standard”* Matthews, “The book that changed how I think about thinking”*
<b>January 12 – 17</b>	<b>Media Overview</b> Bennett, chapters 1, 7 Hendrickson, “Local journalism in crisis: Why America must...”* Luo, “How can the press best serve a democratic society”* Pew, “How Americans Navigated the News in 2020”* (parts 1, 3, 4) Yglesias, “What If Fox News Viewers Watched CNN Instead?”*
<b>January 19</b>	<b>The Political Impact of Social Media</b> Haidt, “Yes, Social Media really is undermining democracy”* Lewis-Kraus, “How harmful is social media?”* Clancy, “Americans differ by party, ideology over the impact...”*
<b>January 24 – 26</b>	<b>How Journalists shape the News</b> Bennett, chapters 5-6 Taussig, “Make Nice, or Screw Them?”* Illing, “Trump exploited a broken press. Here’s how to fix it.”* Rosen, “Why Political Coverage is Broken”*
<b>January 31</b>	<b>Guest Speaker, WRAL’s Laura Leslie</b>
<b>February 2 – 7</b>	<b>Real Media Biases</b> Bennett, chapter 2 Leonhardt, “The six forms of media bias”*
<b>February 9</b>	<b>Partisan/ideological (Partisan Bias)</b> Light, “How did Republicans learn to hate the news media?”* Wilner, “We can probably measure media bias. But do we want to?”* Grossman, “Media Bias (Real and Perceived) and the rise of partisan...”* Mayer, “The making of the Fox News White House”* <i>Paper Assignment #1 due February 9</i>
<b>February 14, 21</b> (February 16 Wellness Day)	<b>Media and Political Campaigns</b> Bennett, chapter 4 Patterson, “A Tale of two elections”* Allsop, “Q&A: Historian Rick Perlstein on media ‘bothsidesism,’...”* Jurkowitz, “U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election...”*
<b>February 23</b>	<b>MIDTERM</b>
<b>February 28</b>	<b>What is Public Opinion?</b> Clawson and Oxley, chapter 1 Lepore, “Politics and the New Machine”* Greenberg, “The Political Scientist Who Warned Us About Polls”*

**March 2 – 9**

**Measuring Public Opinion**

Clawson and Oxley, chapter 1 appendix

Kennedy, “Key things to know about election polling in the United States”\*

Cohn, “We gave four pollsters the same raw data...”\*

Grossman, “How much are polls misrepresenting Americans?”\*

Bui, “Frustrated With Polling? Pollsters Are, Too”\*

Silver, “The Death Of Polling Is Greatly Exaggerated”\*

Funk, “How highly religious Americans view evolution...”\*

Greenberg, “How word choice can have a huge impact on survey...”^

**March 14 – 16**

**Spring Break**

**March 21**

**Guest Speaker: Tom Jensen, Public Policy Polling**

*Outline for paper #2 due March 21*

**March 23 – 28**

**Formation of Public Opinion**

Clawson and Oxley, chapters 2, 4, 6

Weir, “Politics is personal”\*

Edsall, “How Much Do Your Genes Shape Your Politics?”\*

Saletan, “Why Won’t They Listen?”\*

Holt, “Two brains running”\*

Klein, “A new theory for why Republicans and Democrats...”\*

Wilkinson, “Personality and Partisan Polarization”^

**March 30 – April 4**

**Influences of and Influences on Public Opinion**

Clawson and Oxley, chapters 3 & 12

Edsall, “We Can’t Even Agree on What Is Tearing Us Apart”\*

Edsall, “Trump Couldn’t Have Done What He Did Without States...”\*

Matthews, “Studies: Democratic politicians represent middle-class...”\*

Agadjanian, “Why they follow?”\*

**April 6**

**Critical Thinking Assessment**

**April 11**

**Public Opinion and Democracy**

Clawson and Oxley, chapters 7 & 8

Angelucci, “How much do Americans know about the news?”\*

Pew, “Misinformation and competing views of reality...”\*

Griffin, “Racing Apart”\*

**April 13**

**No Class**

*Paper #2 Due April 13*

**April 18 – 20**

**Book Club: *Why We’re Polarized***

**April 27 6:00pm**

**Take Home Final Exam Due**