PLS312: Public Opinion and Elections

Spring 2023

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Nazarbayev University

Last Update: January 18, 2023 (TENTATIVE and SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

1 General Information

Class Hours

Official Class Hours for this class is **Mon**, **Wed**, **Fri**, **13:00** - **13:50** at **Room 2.402**. In general, the course contents will be provided in the following way (adjustments may be made as the semester proceeds):

- On **Mondays**, the course content will generally be offered in a lecture format, covering the general introduction to the contents of the week.
- On Wednesdays/Fridays, the course content will generally be offered in a discussion session format, and students are expected to join in the critical discussions of the readings of the week.

Office Hours

Office hours will be **by appointment**, or you can stop by at my office in **8.507A**, **walk-in hours 14:00-15:00 Mondays/Wednesdays** (students with appointments have a priority). Check the availability from the URL below.

https://calendly.com/gentok/office-hours

Each meeting slot is for 15 minutes. If you want a longer meeting, reserve two slots separately. Make an appointment at least 4 hours prior to the meeting times. If the given slots do not work for you, contact me directly with the proposal of your available times.

2 Prerequisite

It is assumed that students have basic knowledge on social science research design and hypothesis testing through OLS regression (contents covered in PLS211).

3 Course Objectives

Public Opinion is a crucial part of politics, since it is often seen as the source of the government's legitimacy. Election, along with different types of political participation, plays a critical role in connecting public opinion and policy outcomes. Public opinion is especially crucial under a democratic governance, while it is no less relevant for politicians under non-democratic contexts. As a result, public opinion in any country is constantly monitored by political elites and media.

The questions that we ask in this course are basic, but their answers are more complex than they seem. How do people form views about politics? How can we capture what people think and know? When and why people engage in politics? What accounts for differences in people's views? How can media and group membership influence public opinion? And does public opinion improve policy outcomes, or does it undermining them?

While many of our readings talk about American politics, knowledge acquired from this course is similarly relevant in any country. Non-American based studies are also assigned as needed to show the generality of each topic.

4 Readings

We are going to read several (but not all) chapters from the following two textbooks. The e-book links will be available from Moodle when the semester is starting.

- Russel J. Dalton. 2018. Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies. Seventh Edition. CQ Press
- Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2020. Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice. Fourth Edition. CQ Press

Most of the other readings for this course will become available online through Moodle.

5 Software

We use **Discord** to manage course announcements, asking questions, and discussion question submissions. I will also create channels to aid groupwork (and ask questions relating to groupwork).

In the group project assignment for this course, students are expected to use the open-source statistical software R (http://www.r-project.org). On your own computer, you are required to install R. It is also recommended to install RStudio (http://www.rstudio.com/)—a user interface that simplifies many common operations. While R codes will be provided through Moodle, online resources such as R Cookbook (https://rc2e.com/index.html) would be a great resource for you to start out using R and RStudio.

In writing papers, students have the option (while NOT required) to use Overleaf. A brief introduction to this platform for writing a term paper is provided HERE.

6 Course Requirements

There are four components to the course requirements:

- 1. Discussion Questions (25%): Students are asked to post one discussion question to Discord, by 13:00 Tuesdays. The question must be original and must be based on the reading of the week. Questions will be graded on check plus (97.5)—check (82.5)—check minus (67.5) scale. Students are asked to post at least five questions throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, following grade calculation will be made.
 - If posted less than five, the score will be (simple average) \times (# of questions)/5.
 - If posted exactly five, the score will be a *simple average*.
 - If posted more than five, the score will be (simple average) $+2.5\times$ (# of questions -5)

- 2. Response Papers (15% * 2 = 30%): Students are asked to submit exactly two 1-2 page reaction papers based on the readings of a given week, by midnight Mondays. Papers will be graded in A to F scale. More details on expectations will be provided separately.
- 3. Group Project (40%): There will be a original group project assignment. After splitting into groups of 1-4, each group is assigned to one public opinion dataset and asked to analyze the dataset by asking a question relevant to this course. Students are expected to make a comprehensive literature review on the topic of their interest and propose a research design that tests an original question. The project is divided into three parts. (1) Research Proposal (10%, due Midnight, Monday, February 27), (2) Research Presentation (10%, scheduled on weeks 14-15), and (3) Final Paper (20%, due Midnight, Monday, May 1). Additional details about the expectations and the format will be provided separately.
- 4. Participation (5%): Attendance and active engagement in the classroom and during office hours will count toward the participation grade. It will be evaluated on a check plus to minus scale at the end of the semester.

7 Grading Policy

7.1 Grading Scale of Assignments and Exams

Each assignment will be given a **letter grade**, either by A to F or Check plus to minus scale. Each letter grade is translated to a 0-100 scale point by the following tables:

\checkmark + to \checkmark - Scale	A to F Scale	Point	Explanation
√ +	A	97.5	Exceeds the highest expectations.
$Not\ Applicable$	A-	92.5	Satisfies the highest expectations.
Not Applicable	B+	87.5	Satisfies most of the highest expectations.
\checkmark	В	82.5	Fully satisfies the basic expectations and more.
$Not\ Applicable$	B-	77.5	Satisfies the basic expectations.
Not Applicable	C+	72.5	Satisfies most of the basic expectations, but not all.
\checkmark —	\mathbf{C}	67.5	Satisfies some of the basic expectations.
Not Applicable	C-	62.5	Satisfies the minimal expectations.
Not Applicable	D+	57.5	Satisfies most of the minimal expectations.
Not Applicable	D	52.5	Satisfies some of the minimal expectations.
Fail	F	0.0	Does not satisfy the minimal expectations.

^{*24-}hour extension is available. Late submission after 24 hours is NOT allowed at all times.

7.2 Grading Scale of the Course

The final letter grade on the A to F scale will be determined by the weighted average of assignment and exam scores to the percentages presented in the Course Requirements section, using the following table. Extra credit points will be added after the averaging.

Letter Grade	Averaged Point + Extra Credit Point
A	≥ 95
A-	$\geq 90, < 95$
B+	$\geq 85, < 90$
В	$\geq 80, < 85$
В-	$\geq 75, < 80$
C+	$\geq 70, < 75$
\mathbf{C}	$\geq 65, < 70$
C-	$\geq 60, < 65$
D+	$\geq 55, < 60$
D	$\geq 50, < 55$
F	< 50

7.3 Late Submission

For any assignment, the following late submission policies will be applied. The assignment submitted incorrectly will be considered as missing.

- Late submission within 24 hours of the deadline: Allowed without penalty. However, a student needs to notify me by the Google Form (LINK provided in Moodle) before the deadline. Without notification, the assignment will be treated in the same way as the late submission within 1 week of the deadline. Notification through Email is not allowed.
- Late submission within 1 week of the deadline: Allowed with penalty. The highest grade a student can get will be B or ✓. No notification is required.
- Late submission after 1 week of the deadline: Not allowed at all time.

If you have any special reasons that force you to submit after the deadline, please E-mail me or come talk to me **before the deadline**. If the reason is valid, I may extend the deadline for you. I will **not accept any request after the deadline**.

7.4 Regrading Request

If there is a very clear error in grading your assignment or exam, please let me know as soon as possible. However, if you wish to contest your grade on other grounds, then you must submit a written request to me by the Google Form (LINK provided in Moodle) with following contents:

- Clearly identify the components of the exam or assignment that should be reconsidered.
- For each component, **propose the score** that you thing you deserve on that specific component.
- For each component, provide at least a paragraph length explanation for why you think your score should be reconsidered.

I will only have a right to **accept or reject** your proposal. If your proposed score and explanation are compelling, I will change your score on that specific component to the score you proposed. Otherwise, I will reject it and keep the score as it is.

Under no circumstances will I change any score on any assignment more than one week after we have released the grades to the class. If you anticipate that it will take you more than a week to review your graded assignment and draft a response, then you will need to request an extension in advance.

8 Course Outline

The schedule and contents are subject to change.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS PUBLIC OPINION?

Week 1: January 9, 11, 13

- Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman. 2018. "Chapter 8: Public Opinion." In American Government, Second Edition. University Press of Florida
- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 1 "Public Opinion in a Democracy" and Appendix to Chapter 1 "Studying Public Opinion Empirically"
- (Optional) Dalton (2018) Chapter 1 "Introduction" & Chapter 2 "The Nature of Citizen Beliefs"

Sources of Public Opinion

Week 2: January 16, 18, 20

- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 2 "Political Socialization"
- Walter Lippmann. 1922. "Chapter 1: The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads."
 In Public Opinion. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6456/pg6456-images.html
- Milton Lodge, Kathleen M McGraw, and Patrick Stroh. 1989. "An Impression-Driven Model of Candidate Evaluation." *The American Political Science Review:* 399–419
- John R. Zaller. 1992. "Chapter 3: How Citizens Acquire Information and Convert It into Public Opinion." In *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 40–52. Cambridge University Press

MECHANICS OF VOTING

Week 3: January 23, 25, 27

- Dalton (2018) Chapter 8 "The Social Bases of Party Support," Chapter 9 "Partisanship and Voting," and Chapter 10 "Attitudes and Voting Choice"
- Anthony Downs. 1957b. "Chapter 3: The Basic Logic of Voting." In *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, 36–49. New York: Harper and Brothers

- Morris P Fiorina. 1981. "Chapter 1: Theories of Retrospective Voting." In Retrospective Voting in American National Elections. New Haven: Yale University Press
- (Optional) Angus Campbell et al. 1980. *The American Voter*. Chapter 6, 7, and 8. University of Chicago Press
- (Optional) Dalton (2018) Chapter 7 "Elections and Political Parties"

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Week 4: January 30, February 1, 3

- Dalton (2018) Chapter 3 "How We Participate," Chapter 4 "Who Participates?"
- Anthony Downs. 1957a. "Chapter 14: The Causes and Effects of Rational Abstention." In An Economic Theory of Democracy, 260–276. New York: Harper and Brothers
- Timothy J. Feddersen. 2004. "Rational Choice Theory and the Paradox of Not Voting." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 18 (1): 99–112
- James H Fowler. 2006a. "Habitual Voting and Behavioral Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (2): 335–344
- (Optional): William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." The American Political Science Review 62 (1): 25–42

Week 5: February 6, 8, 10

- Timur Kuran. 1991. "Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989." World Politics 44 (1): 7–48
- Dietram A. Scheufele and P. Moy. 2000. "Twenty-Five Years of the Spiral of Silence: A Conceptual Review and Empirical Outlook." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 12 (1): 3
- Davide Cantoni et al. 2019. "Protests as Strategic Games: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong's Antiauthoritarian Movement." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 134, no. 2 (January): 1021–1077
- Timothy Frye and Ekaterina Borisova. 2019. "Elections, Protest, and Trust in Government: A Natural Experiment from Russia." *The Journal of Politics* 81, no. 3 (July): 820–832
- (Optional): Mark Granovetter. 1978. "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior." American Journal of Sociology 83 (6): 1420–1443
- (Optional): Wendy Pearlman. 2016. "Moral Identity and Protest Cascades in Syria." British Journal of Political Science: 1–25
- (Optional): E. Noelle-Neumann. 1974. "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion." Journal of Communication 24 (2): 43–51
- (Optional): S. Erdem Aytaç, Luis Schiumerini, and Susan Stokes. 2017. "Protests and Repression in New Democracies." *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 1 (March): 62–82

Week 6: February 13, 15, 17

• Kevin Croke et al. 2016. "Deliberate Disengagement: How Education Can Decrease Political Participation in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes." American Political Science Review 110, no. 3 (August): 579–600

- Ora John Reuter. 2021. "Civic Duty and Voting under Autocracy." *The Journal of Politics* 83 (4): 1602–1618
- Gwyneth H. McClendon. 2014. "Social Esteem and Participation in Contentious Politics: A Field Experiment at an LGBT Pride Rally." American Journal of Political Science 58 (2): 279–290
- Leah R. Rosenzweig. 2019. "Social Voting in Semi-Authoritarian Systems." Working Paper, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, October 21
- (Optional): Christopher Blattman. 2009. "From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in Uganda." The American Political Science Review 103 (2): 231–247
- (Optional) James H. Fowler. 2006b. "Altruism and Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 3 (August 1): 674–683

DESCRIBING PUBLIC OPINION: POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Week 7: February 20, 22, 24

- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 8 "Knowledge, Interest, and Attention to Politics"
- Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter. 1996. What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters. Introduction, Chapter 1 and 2. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Larry M. Bartels. 1996. "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections." American Journal of Political Science 40 (1): 194–230
- Arthur Lupia. 2006. "How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence." *Critical Review* 18 (1-3): 217–232
- Cheryl Boudreau and Arthur Lupia. 2011. "Political Knowledge." In *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, edited by James N. Druckman et al., 508–521. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- (Optional): Markus Prior and Arthur Lupia. 2008. "Money, Time, and Political Knowledge: Distinguishing Quick Recall and Political Learning Skills." American Journal of Political Science 52 (1): 169–183
- (Optional): Kathleen Dolan. 2011. "Do Women and Men Know Different Things? Measuring Gender Differences in Political Knowledge." *The Journal of Politics* 73 (1): 97–107

DESCRIBING PUBLIC OPINION: POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Week 8: February 27, March 1, 3

- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 5 "Ideology, Partisanship, and Polarization" and Chapter 6 "Roots of Public Opinion: Personality, Self-Interest, Values, and History"
- Dalton (2018) Chapter 6 "Issues and Ideological Orientations"
- Hulda Thorisdottir et al. 2007. "Psychological Needs and Values Underlying Left-Right Political Orientation: Cross-National Evidence from Eastern and Western Europe." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (January 1): 175–203
- Masahisa Endo and Willy Jou. 2014. "How Does Age Affect Perceptions of Parties' Ideological Locations?" Senkyo Kenkyu [Japanese Journal of Electoral Studies] 30 (1): 96–112
- (Optional) Philip E. Converse. 1964. "The Nature of Belief System in Mass Publics." In *Ideology and Discontent*, edited by D. E. Apter, 206–261. New York, NY: Free Press

- (Optional): Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2008. "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting." The American Political Science Review 102 (2): 215–232
- (Optional): David E. Broockman. 2016. "Approaches to Studying Policy Representation." Legislative Studies Quarterly 41, no. 1 (February): 181–215

EXPLAINING PUBLIC OPINION: HEURISTICS AND MEDIA

Week 9: March 6, 8, 10

- Arthur Lupia. 1994. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." The American Political Science Review 88 (1): 63–76
- Richard R Lau and David P Redlawsk. 2001. "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making." *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (4): 951–971
- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 3 "Mass Media" (especially pp.98-114. Other sections are optional)
- Markus Prior. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." American Journal of Political Science 49 (3): 577–592
- (Optional) Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman. 1974. "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases." *Science* 185 (4157): 1124–1131
- (Optional) Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury. 2007. "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models." *Journal of Communication* 57 (1): 9–20
- (Optional) Paul Allen Beck et al. 2002. "The Social Calculus of Voting: Interpersonal, Media, and Organizational Influences on Presidential Choices." The American Political Science Review 96 (1): 57–73
- (Optional) Matthew A Baum and Angela S Jamison. 2006. "The Oprah Effect: How Soft News Helps Inattentive Citizens Vote Consistently." The Journal of Politics 68 (4): 946–959
- (Optional) Robert Huckfeldt. 2001. "The Social Communication of Political Expertise." American Journal of Political Science 45 (2): 425–438

EXPLAINING PUBLIC OPINION: GROUP IDENTITY

Week 10: March 13, 15, 17

- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 7 "The Central Role of Groups"
- Henri Tajfel and John Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 33–47. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing
- Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber. 2000. "Three Steps toward a Theory of Motivated Reasoning." In *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, edited by Arthur Lupia, Mathew D McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin. Cambridge University Press
- Samara Klar. 2013. "The Influence of Competing Identity Primes on Political Preferences." The Journal of Politics 75 (4): 1108–1124
- (Optional) Leonie Huddy. 2002. "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory." *Political Psychology* 22 (1): 127–156

- (Optional) Anna Bassi, Rebecca B. Morton, and Kenneth C. Williams. 2011. "The Effects of Identities, Incentives, and Information on Voting." The Journal of Politics 73 (2): 558–571
- (Optional) Leonie Huddy, LiLiana Mason, and Aaroøe Lene. 2015. "Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity." The American Political Science Review 109, no. 1 (February): 1–17
- (Optional): Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." Public Opinion Quarterly 76 (3): 405–431
- (Optional): Scott L. Althaus and Kevin Coe. 2011. "Social Identity Processes and the Dynamics of Public Support for War." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (1): 65–88
- (Optional): Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood. 2015. "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." American Journal of Political Science 59, no. 3 (July): 690–707

Week 11: SPRING BREAK

POLICY REPRESENTATION

Week 12: March 27, 29, 31

- Dalton (2018) Chapter 11 "Political Representation"
- Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 12 "Impact of Public Opinion on Policy"
- Robert S. Erikson, Michael B.MacKuen, and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. Chapter 6 and 8. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 03 (September): 564–581
- Dan Hiaeshutter-Rice, Stuart Soroka, and Christopher Wlezien. 2021. "Freedom of the Press and Public Responsiveness." *Perspectives on Politics* 19, no. 2 (June): 479–491
- (Optional) Clawson and Oxley (2020) Chapter 13 "Conclusion"
- (Optional) Benjamin I. Page, Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans." *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 01 (March): 51–73
- (Optional) Cale Horne. 2012. "The Consistency of Policy with Opinion in the Russian Federation, 1992–2006." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 22, no. 3 (August 1): 215–244
- (Optional) Anna Efimova and Denis Strebkov. 2020. "Linking Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Russia." The International Spectator 55, no. 1 (January 2): 93–111
- (Reference) Benjamin I. Page and Robert. Y. Shapiro. 1992. The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Voter Competence

Week 13: April 3, 5, 7

• Richard R Lau and David P Redlawsk. 1997. "Voting Correctly." The American Political Science Review 91 (3): 585–598

- Larry M. Bartels. 2008. "The Irrational Electorate." The Wilson Quarterly 32 (4): 44
- Scott Ashworth and Ethan Bueno de Mesquita. 2014. "Is Voter Competence Good for Voters?: Information, Rationality, and Democratic Performance." The American Political Science Review 108 (3): 565–587
- Andrew T. Little, Keith E. Schnakenberg, and Ian R. Turner. 2022. "Motivated Reasoning and Democratic Accountability." American Political Science Review 116, no. 2 (May): 751– 767
- (Optional) James H. Kuklinski et al. 2001. "The Political Environment and Citizen Competence." American Journal of Political Science 45 (2): 410–424
- (Optional) Gento Kato. 2020. "When Strategic Uninformed Abstention Improves Democratic Accountability." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 32, no. 3 (July): 366–388
- (Optional) Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra. 2009. "Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy." The American Political Science Review 103 (3): 387–406
- (Optional) Sean Gailmard and John Patty. 2019. "Preventing Prevention." American Journal of Political Science 63 (2): 342–352
- (Reference) Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. Democracy for Realists. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Week 14: April 10, 12, 14

Week 15: April 17, 19, 21

9 Academic Conduct

I do not expect that any of the students in this course will violate the University's Student Code of Conduct. However, please be aware that cheating, plagiarism, or other violations of the Code will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Vice Dean and/or the Dean for appropriate action. In addition, students caught cheating and/or plagiarising will get an automatic zero (i.e., fail) for the relevant exam or assignment. Please check NU Student Code of Conduct for more details (https://nu.edu.kz/media/upload/NU-Student-Code-of-Conduct.pdf). Also, NU library provides a helpful guideline regarding academic integrity (https://nu.kz.libguides.com/avoiding_plagiarism/academicintegrity).

10 A Safe and Comfortable Learning Environment

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe and comfortable learning environment for my students and for the university as a whole. If you have any problems or concerns regarding your student life, including, but not limited to relationships, stress, self-esteem, body image, sexuality, anxiety, and/or depression, NU Health and Wellness Center (HWC) provides consultation service for you. Contact nu_counseling@nu.edu.kz or make an appointment with psychologist through NU web portal, under HWC \rightarrow Consultation tab. HWC also has YouTube Channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZZCN6Kc7UcwWJ04Ai3y0XQ) with additional resources.