

POS 3233 | Politics & Public Opinion

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
FALL 2025

Instructor: David Macdonald, Ph.D.

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Time & Location:

- Tuesdays 1:55 PM - 2:45 PM (ROL 0205)
- Thursdays 1:55 PM - 3:50 PM (ROL 0205)

Office Hours:

- Anderson Hall 207
- Mondays 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM & 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM
- Also by email appointment if necessary

Course Description

Politics & Public Opinion (POS 3233) is an upper-level undergraduate course that explores the causes and consequences of public opinion, a key concept in the broader study of democracy. This course specifically focuses on the United States, but many of the insights we have gleaned from the study of American public opinion can be applied to other countries and contexts. In this course, we will study the fundamentals and logic of survey design, explore the various sources of political attitudes, and examine the policy consequences of mass opinion. You will also ideally become more statistically literate and “less afraid” of numbers than you were coming into this course. To do this, we will read a variety of academic articles and get hands-on experience in analyzing and manipulating high-quality public opinion data.

Course Objectives

Students should exit this course being familiar with:

- The fundamentals of survey design, e.g., sampling, weighting, and question-wording effects
- How ordinary people come to form political opinions
- The relationship between mass opinion and public policy
- How to interpret the results of public opinion surveys
- How to properly analyze survey data and present relevant insights

Required Texts & Readings

There is no assigned textbook. I will make each of the readings, which are drawn from a variety of academic journals, electronically available as a PDF on the Canvas course website. These readings are listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus.

Course Policies

Canvas

The course website will be on Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>). It is here that you will be able to access all of the assignments, readings, and study guides. All readings, study guides, and assignment instructions are available under the “Files” tab on Canvas. The reading response submission site is available under the “Assignments” tab on Canvas.

Grades

Your overall course grade will be comprised of the following weighted components. Further detailed instructions about these assignments will be given in class and posted on the course website.

- **Reading Responses** (25%)
 - Readings listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus
 - PDF copies of each article available on course Canvas website
 - Write a total of 2 paragraphs (1st = summary of article | 2nd = your thoughts)
 - Post response on Canvas by 1:45 PM **before** our first class meeting of the week
 - There are 11 total opportunities; you need to submit 10 for full credit
 - IF YOU CHEAT AND USE **AI**, I WILL FIND OUT AND HAUNT YOUR DREAMS
- **Exam I** (20%)
 - Closed-book multiple choice exam on Tuesday 09/30
- **Exam II** (20%)
 - Closed-book multiple choice exam on Tuesday 11/18
- **Survey Data Project** (35%)
 - Using Stata to analyze data from the 2024 Cooperative Election Study (CES)
 - Instructions posted on Canvas
 - Email to instructor (as a PDF) by 11:59 PM on Tuesday 12/02

Letter grades will be assigned as follows.

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	<60
A–	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66		
		B–	80-82	C–	70-72	D–	60-62		

Extra Credit

I DO NOT give out extra credit, but I am willing to round up borderline grades in certain cases. Student participation, preparation, and effort may be taken into consideration in deciding whether to round up borderline grades.

Lecture Notes & Study Guides

I DO NOT make my lecture slides available on Canvas. You need to come to class in order to truly learn and absorb the material. I will, however, give out a study guide before each exam.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted except as a result of unusual/extenuating circumstances that have been discussed with the instructor.

Email

All email correspondence in this course must be through your UF student email. Please keep it professional when writing and responding to emails.

Electronics

I expect you to keep your phones away and to only use laptops for the purpose of note-taking. If I notice that you are frequently using such devices for other purposes and thus not paying attention nor participating in class, then I will NOT round up your borderline grades.

Decorum

Students in this course are expected to follow the “Golden Rule” of treating others as you wish to be treated. Everyone in this class has the right to speak and to be heard, but this right is not unlimited. Ultimately, we are all responsible for the things we say and do. There will also be ZERO tolerance regarding any threats of violence toward the instructor(s) and/or students, be they verbal or written. Such threats will be reported to University Police.

Reasonable Accommodations

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes difficult and unfortunate things happen in our lives that can make attending class and thus being academically successful very difficult. As such, I am willing, if possible, to help you overcome such difficulties. If you are experiencing challenging life circumstances and need help to succeed in the course, please speak to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to as it will often be too late for me to do anything. Please see the following link (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/helping-students/your-well-being/>) and/or reach out to a medical professional for any physical or mental health problems.

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus and course schedule during the semester as necessary. That being said, if there are any changes, every effort will be made to alert you in writing as far in advance as possible.

University Policies

Academic Honor Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the following link for more information. <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>.

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who are requesting special accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ or **352-392-8565**) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal education use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and deliver by an instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentation such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless, of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: (1) The email they receive from GatorEvals, (2) Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or, (3) The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluer.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive

feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Course Schedule

The instructions (and submission space) for the Reading Responses are on Canvas. To receive full credit for this component of your overall grade, you need to write **two paragraphs**; one that summarizes the article and a second that articulates your personal opinion of the article. There are 11 total opportunities (W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W8, W9, W10, W11, W12, and W13). You need to complete 10 of them for full credit. All assigned readings are available as PDFs on Canvas.

Week 1 - Course Introduction

- Class Meetings
 - Thursday 08/21 only
- No readings this week

Week 2 - Polling & Survey Design I

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 08/26 & Thursday 08/28
- Reading Response
 - Berinsky (2017) *Annual Review of Political Science*

Week 3 - Polling & Survey Design II

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/02 & Thursday 09/04
- Reading Response
 - Westwood, Messing, and Lelkes (2020) *Journal of Politics*

Week 4 - Political Information & Conspiracy Theories

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/09 & Thursday 09/11
- Reading Response
 - Enders et al. (2023) *Political Behavior*

Week 5 - Ideology

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/16 & Thursday 09/18
- Reading Response
 - Jefferson (2024) *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Week 6 - Partisanship & Political Socialization

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/23 & Thursday 09/25
- Reading Response
 - Jungkunz and Weiss (2024) *Perspectives on Politics*

Week 7 - EXAM I

- Exam in class @ regular time on Tuesday 09/30 (study guide on Canvas)
- No class Thursday 10/02 (use this time to work on your project!)

Week 8 - Sources of Mass Opinion: Political Elites & The Mass Media

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/07 & Thursday 10/09
- Reading Response
 - Kim and Patterson (2024) *American Political Science Review*

Week 9 - Sources of Mass Opinion: Groups, Values, and Self-Interest

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/14 & Thursday 10/16
- Reading Response (pick one article out of these three!)
 - Jones (2023) *Journal of Politics*
 - Margalit (2013) *American Political Science Review*
 - Vishwanath (2025) *British Journal of Political Science*

Week 10 - Brief Overview of Voting Behavior

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/21 & Thursday 10/23
- Reading Response
 - Lucas et al. (2024) *American Political Science Review*

Week 11 - Aggregate Public Opinion

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/28 & Thursday 10/30
- Reading Response
 - Norrander and Wilcox (2023) *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Week 12 - The Opinion-Policy Connection

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 11/04 & Thursday 11/06
- Reading Response
 - Enns (2014) *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 13 - Political Polarization

- Class Meetings
 - Thursday 11/13 only (Veteran's Day on Tuesday 11/11)
- Reading Response
 - Fiorina (2024) *Hoover Institution Series*

Week 14 - Exam II

- Exam in class @ regular time on Tuesday 11/18 (study guide on Canvas)
- No class on Thursday 11/20 (use this time to work on your project!)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- Use this time to relax and take care of your mental and physical health!
- Please feel free to email me if you have any questions!

Week 15 - Final Project Due!

- No Formal Class Meetings
 - I will be in my office for any last-minute assistance (on Monday 12/01 & Tuesday 12/02)
- Survey Data Project Due
 - Email a PDF copy to instructor
 - Due by 11:59 PM on Tuesday 12/02
 - Late (-10 points) on Wednesday 12/03 (no other late submissions will be accepted!)