Course Purpose

The topic of “public opinion” is vast, a huge literature, and ranges from grand philosophical expositions to arcane statistical analyses. This course takes a middle ground and examines various quandaries informing current research. It is not a seminar on how to conduct a survey, or how to extract wisdom from poll data, though both of these topics receive attention. Readings are generally non-technical and my explications stress the choices facing those grappling with survey data.

Requirements

The following books are to be purchased (as well as a course pack):
- Fiorina, *Culture War?: The Myth of A Polarized America*
- Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*
- Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*

There will be a comprehensive take-home exam due on Dec. 18.

Sept 6. Introduction and Overview

Sept 13 Defining Public Opinion: Basic Issues

Sept 20 Defining Public Opinion: Problems of Measurement

Sept 27 Public Opinion Organizations

Oct 4 Public Opinion and Popular Control

Oct 11 Public Competence
Oct. 18 **Opinion Volatility**

Oct. 25 **Opinions and Behavior**
Liska ed. *The Consistency Controversy*, Articles by DeFleur & Westie, La Pierre and Deutscher

Nov. 1 **Opinion and Government Policy: Conceptual Issues**

Nov. 8 **Opinion and Government Policy: Some Data**
Weissberg, *Polling, Policy and Public Opinion*, Chapters 4, 5

Nov. 15 **The Interpretation of Poll Data**

Nov. 22 **A Case Study in the Politics of Poll Interpretation**
Fiorina, *Culture War?: The Myth of A Polarized America*.

**Take Home Exam distributed**

Nov/ 29 **The Democratic Case for Polling**

Dec. 6 **The Democratic Case Against Polling**

Dec. 13 **Going Beyond the Humdrum Poll**

**Dec 18 Take Home Exam Due**