

## **COMM 7813: PUBLIC OPINION & COMMUNICATION**

AU 2018

Class Time: Thursdays 9:10 to 11 a.m.

Location: Derby 3116

Dr. Gerald Kosicki

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Office Hours: 10-11 a.m. Tuesdays, and by appointment

### **Course Description**

This is a hybrid course that examines contemporary and historical conceptions of public opinion, and emphasizes the importance of communication as a dynamic element in the formation of public opinion. We will review both historical and philosophical conceptions of public opinion as well as modern interpretations of this concept.

Public opinion is at its core a perspective on population research. Methods for population study such as survey research are relevant, but so increasingly are issues of big data, text analysis, and other forms of social media analysis.

Public opinion is one of the oldest social science concepts, which presents certain problems and opportunities for study. The invention of public opinion as an alternative to governance by kings or other aristocratic rulers was a significant achievement of western culture. This history a key to understanding the continuing importance and legitimacy of public opinion and the central role of communication. It is also relevant to consider the conditions by which informed public opinion was created and what conditions are needed for quality public opinion. To some extent, these discussions must also address the measurement of public opinion, focusing on the change over time and critiques of current measurement practices. We will also discuss how public opinion is evaluated in terms of its rationality, stability, and quality. Some research will deal with different kinds of theories and levels of analysis.

The readings for the class are listed later in this syllabus. We will talk about the priorities and order of importance of the readings each week. I expect that everyone will read these articles and chapters prior to class and be prepared to discuss them. Discussion leaders will be expected to read more deeply in the topic area they are discussing so that they may bring more to the table than the average student.

### **Course Learning Objectives**

- 1) Understand the most important theoretical issues involved in the contemporary study of public opinion in populations from a communication perspective.
- 2) Understand the historical development and emergence of public opinion in western societies along with mass literacy and technology of popular communication.

- 3) Become familiar with the key research methods and data sources used to study public opinion in populations – random population surveys -- and understand why these are used, as well as their strengths and limitations.
- 4) Appreciate other, newer methods such as data analytics, text analytics, etc., and how they benefit scholars interested in studying public opinion in populations.
- 5) Understand what are the major differences between the study of public opinion and the study of “public consultation,” and under what circumstances is the use of each most appropriate?

### **Class materials**

There is one required text for the class:

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. (2017). *Decoding the social world: Data science and the unintended consequences of communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Note: There is a Kindle version of this book available, as well as some “used” copies on Amazon.

Additional readings are available on Carmen.

### **Requirements & grading**

Evaluations of student performance will be based on several criteria: in-class discussion leader duties, general in-class participation (on non-discussion leader days), the seminar paper. You will also write a critique of Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon’s book, *Decoding the Social World: Data Science and the Unintended Consequences of Communication* that we will read during the semester. The weighting of these evaluation criteria will be the following:

Discussion leader duties	20%
General class participation	10%
Response papers (4)	20%
Final research paper	20%
Critique of <i>Decoding the Social World</i>	10%
Midterm Exam	<u>20%</u>
Total:	100%

### **Grades**

The OSU “standard scheme” of points grading as implemented by Carmen/Canvas is used and I will try to keep the grades on Carmen/Canvas’s grade book. Here is the OSU “standard scheme”: 93 - 100 (A), 90 - 92.99 (A-), 87 - 89.99 (B+), 83 - 86.99 (B), 80 - 82.99 (B-), 77 - 79.99 (C+), 73 - 76.99 (C), 70 - 72.99 (C-), 67 - 69.99 (D+), 60 - 66.99 (D), Below 60 (E). Note that there is no rounding in the points system.

### **Response papers**

Each of you will pick four week’s readings and prepare essays dealing with the

themes contained in those readings or other materials, e.g. videos. Each paper should be around 500 words (about one page, single-spaced), but if you want to write more this is not a problem. You will sign up for due dates for the essays, and they should be uploaded to Canvas before the start of class for the week you are writing about. I want your reactions to the course materials – not to our seminar discussions or lectures -- so the idea is that you get these in before class.

In preparing the essay, first consider ALL the material that is assigned for the given week, that is, read any articles or chapters assigned, watch any films, etc., and think about a crosscutting theme that runs through these materials. In your essay, provide a concise description of the theme, and explain what you mean by it. Offer your reaction to the theme. It is very important to write absolutely accurate, factual information.

The best essays will articulate a point of view with respect to the materials and then use facts from the materials to support this argument. These papers should *not* be a summary of the main points. I am more interested in your reaction to the information. This might involve the usefulness of the information, the level of interest you have in it, anything that you found particularly surprising or disappointing, etc.

Note that although these essays are short, they should contain the elements of any well-written essay: A good, creative title, strong lead, and good introduction, transitions and conclusion. A specific grading rubric will be placed on Carmen. Check that for the specific quality criteria for which points are assigned.

### **Discussion leading**

Each session will be led by a student. The discussion plan must be discussed with me. Most typically I will have some specific goals and expectations, and often will want to contribute a few slides or request some specific amount of time to make some points. We can discuss the details of this on the first class day. But generally students will volunteer to lead or co-lead a session, depending on the exact enrollment. Beginning the second week, students will volunteer to prepare a series of discussion questions and to lead class discussion on the assigned readings for that day and any appropriate background information that might help put those readings in context. This will vary by week, but students should prepare about 15-25 minutes of introduction to the topic. PowerPoints are encouraged as needed. Also please circulate before class 7-8 thoughtful discussion questions that address individual readings/chapters as well as how the readings might relate to each other, or to previous readings. The discussion questions should be emailed to the class (and me) the day before the first class of the week no later than about 6 p.m.

Discussion leaders will be evaluated based on the quality of their presentations and questions, depth of understanding of the material, and their performance in leading the discussion.

**General in-class participation**

Students not serving as a discussion leader for a given class will be evaluated on their participation in debate and ability to intelligently discuss the assigned readings. The first, minimum component of this is class attendance. However, ALL students will be expected to participate fully in the seminar by both asking questions and answering them during each and every class period. While a reasonable quantity of verbal participation is a necessary condition for a positive evaluation, it is not sufficient. The quality of questions and answers and the value they add to the learning environment of the seminar will be considered when evaluating your participation.

**Personal technology**

Your laptop computer, iPad or similar devices are welcome in class as long as they are used to enhance your ability to participate in an informed and constructive manner. You should not be using personal technology in the classroom to email, chat, check social media or otherwise distract yourself or others from the classroom work. I reserve the right to ban the use of technology from the room in general, or for specific individuals if these rules are abused.

**Seminar paper**

I want to encourage a variety of final paper types, depending on the needs of each student. Here are some suggestions and I'm open to other possibilities. Please ask if you have additional ideas.

- 1) The final paper could be a research proposal in which you design an original research study, using any method (e.g., experiment, survey, content analysis, case study, mixed-modes, etc.). The proposal should be inspired by, but not constrained, by the course material. Please prepare your paper using the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA). If students enroll from other disciplines in which other reference systems are customary, I'm open to the formats with which you have the most comfort and opportunity for publication. The proposal should include 1) substantive literature review that discusses your theoretical approach and develops your hypotheses; and 2) a detailed methods section that describes how you would carry out the proposed study and test your hypotheses.
- 2) Alternatively, if you already have access to previously collected original data or are using secondary data, you might consider preparing an original research/conference paper that includes a literature review, methods, results and discussion.
- 3) If you have an original research idea that would be suitable for submission to the National Science Foundation's TESS program, Timesharing Experiments in the Social Sciences, please discuss this with me. A fully developed formal proposal to TESS is an acceptable seminar paper. Note that these are quite brief, but the format, length and other specifications are quite exacting, according to the

submission rules on the TESS website. You can find the details at <http://tessexperiments.org>.

- 4) Students starting out in graduate school or public opinion particularly might find it beneficial to use the final paper to develop a detailed literature review on some specific topic. Please discuss this with me.

If you have additional paper ideas, you are welcome to discuss them with me.

By middle of the semester, if not sooner, each of you should schedule an appointment with me to discuss your topic and approach to the final paper. If you wish to share early drafts with me, that can be arranged.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

#### **Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

While many people associate academic misconduct with "cheating," the term encompasses a wider scope of student behaviors which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Violation of course rules;
- Violation of program regulations;
- Knowingly providing or receiving information during a course exam or program assignment;
- Possession and/or use of unauthorized materials during a course exam or program assignment;
- Knowingly providing or using assistance in the laboratory, on field work, or on a course assignment, unless such assistance has been authorized specifically by the course instructor or, where appropriate, a project/research supervisor;
- Submission of work not performed in a course: This includes (but is not limited to) instances where a student fabricates and/or falsifies information for an academic assignment. It also includes instances where a student submits data or information (such as a term paper) from one course to satisfy the requirements of another course, unless submission of such work is permitted by the instructor;
- Submitting plagiarized work for a course/program assignment;
- Serving as or asking another student to serve as a substitute while taking an exam.

## **Accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities**

### **Requesting accommodations**

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu) ; 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu) ; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

### **Attendance while having flu and other flu-like illnesses**

You should not attend class while ill with influenza. Students with flu-like symptoms will be asked to leave class. The illness and self-isolation period will usually be about a week. It is very important that individuals avoid spreading the flu to others. Most students should be able to complete a successful semester despite a flu-induced absence. If you are absent due to the flu, you will be provided with a reasonable opportunity to make up missed work. Completion of all assignments and exams assures the greatest chance for students to develop heightened understanding and content mastery. The opportunity to complete all assignments and exams supports the university's desire to enable students to make responsible situational decisions, including the decision to avoid spreading a contagious virus to other students, staff, and faculty, without endangering their academic work. Students with the flu do not need to provide a physician's certification of illness. However, ill students should inform their teachers (but not through personal contact in which there is a risk of exposing others to the virus) as soon as possible that they are absent because of the flu.

### **Diversity**

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise

diverse cultures.

### **Title IX**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at [titleix@osu.edu](mailto:titleix@osu.edu).

### **Student Academic Services**

Arts and Sciences Advising and Academic Services' website provides support for student academic success. Information on advising issues such as tutoring, transfer credits, academic standing, and contact information for Arts and Sciences advisors can be obtained through this website. The site is:

<http://advising.osu.edu/welcome.shtml>

### *Student Services*

The Student Service Center assists with financial aid matters, tuition and fee payments. Please see their site at: <http://ssc.osu.edu>

### *Copyright Disclaimer*

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE AND READINGS (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

### Week 1, August 23

Course Introduction

Survey research and public opinion

Recommended:

Berinsky, A.J. (2017). Measuring public opinion with surveys. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 309-29.

Weisberg, H.F. (2018). Total survey error. *Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*.

### Week 2, August 30

Perspectives on the nature of public opinion.

Tilly, C. (1983) Speaking your mind without elections, surveys or social movements. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, 461-478.

Gunnell, J.C. (2011). Democracy and the concept of public opinion. In G.C. Edwards III, Lawrence R. Jacobs, and Robert Y. Shapiro, (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*.

Price, V. (2008). The public and public opinion in political theories. In W. Donsbach & M.W. Traugott, (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Sanders, L.M. (1999). Democratic politics and survey research. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 29, 248-80.

Converse, P.E. (1987). Changing conceptions of public opinion in the political process. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51, Supplement: 12-24.

Herbst, S. (1991). Classical democracy, polls and public opinion: Theoretical frameworks for studying the development of public sentiment. *Communication Theory* 1,3, 225-238.

Bourdieu, P. (1973/1993). Public opinion does not exist. In P. Bourdieu. *Sociology in question* (pp. 149-157). London: Sage Publications.

### Week 3, September 6

Methods for studying populations and public opinion, and paths not taken

Delli Carpini, M.X. (2011). Constructing public opinion: A brief history of survey research. In G.C. Edwards III, Lawrence R. Jacobs, and Robert Y. Shapiro, (Eds.), *The*



*Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media.*

Oberschall, A. (2012). The historical roots of public opinion research. In W. Donsbach & M.W. Traugott, (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Blumer, H. (1948). Public opinion and public opinion polling. *American Sociological Review* 13, 542-554.

Goot, M. (2008). Mass-Observation and modern public opinion research. In W. Donsbach & M.W. Traugott, (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Gallup, G. (1947). The Quintamensional Plan of question design. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 3, 385-393.

Recommended:

Zetterberg, H.L. (2008). The start of modern public opinion research. In W. Donsbach and M.W. Traugott, (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*.

#### **Week 4, September 13**

New technologies for studying public opinion in context.

Razo, A. (2018). Integration of contextual data: Opportunities and challenges. In L.R. Atkeson & R.M. Avarez (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*.

Gimpel, J.G. (2018). Sampling for studying context: Traditional surveys and new directions. In L.R. Atkeson & R.M. Avarez (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*.

Salvanto, A.M. (2018). Exit polling today and what the future may hold. In L.R. Atkeson & R.M. Avarez (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*.

#### **Week 5, September 20**

Public opinion and (mis)information.

Hochschild, J. & Einstein, K.L. (2014). It isn't what we don't know that gives us trouble, it's what we know that ain't so: Misinformation and Democratic politics. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45, 467-475.

Jamieson, K.H. & Hardy, B.W. (2011). The effect of media on public knowledge. In G.C. Edwards III, L.R. Jacobs, and R.Y. Shapiro (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*.

Visser, P.S., Holbrook, A. & Krosnick, J.A. (2012). Knowledge and attitudes. In W. Donsbach and M.W. Traugott (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*.

### **Week 6, September 27**

Manufacturing misinformation about the Affordable Care Act.

Leimbigler, B. & Lammert, C. (2016). Why health care reform now? Strategic framing and the passage of Obamacare. *Social Policy and Administration*, 50, 4, pp 467-481.

Pasek, J., Sood, G. & Krosnick, J.A. (2015). Misinformed about the Affordable Care Act? Leveraging uncertainty to assess the prevalence of misperceptions. *Journal of Communication*, 65, 660-673.

Centola, D. (2018). *How behavior spreads: The science of complex contagions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 3, The theory of complex contagions, pp. 34-62.

Nyhan, B. (2010). Why the “death panel” myth wouldn’t die: Misinformation in the health care reform debate. *The Forum*, 8, 1, Article 5.

Kaiser Family Foundation. (2012). Data note: A snapshot of public opinion on the individual mandate. March.

### **Week 7, October 4**

Tracing ideas and influence of ideas from organizations and social movements to public opinion.

Bail, C.A. The fringe effect: Civil society organizations and the evolution of media discourse about Islam since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. *American Sociological Review*, 77, 6, 855-879.

Rohlinger, D.A. & Snow, D.A. Social psychological perspectives on crowds and social movements. In J. Delamater, (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*. New York: Kluwer Academic.

Weber, K. & King, B. (2014). Social movement theory and organization studies. In P. Adler et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory, and Organizational Studies: Contemporary Currents*.

Wilkerson J., Smith, D. & Stramp, N. (2015). Tracing the flow of policy ideas in legislatures: A text reuse approach. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59, 4, 943-956.

Recommended:

Bail, C. (2014). *Terrified. How anti-Muslim fringe organizations became mainstream*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## **Week 8, October 11**

Autumn Break.

## **Week 9, October 18**

News, petitions, and origins of public opinion

Kaiser, T.E. (2011). The public sphere. In W. Doyle (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Regime*.

Zaret, D. (2005). Neither faith nor commerce: Printing and the unintended origins of English public opinion. In J. Alexander (Ed.), *Real civil societies: The dilemmas of institutionalization*. London: Sage Publications.

Peacey, J. (2012). News, pamphlets, and public opinion. In L.L. Knoppers, (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*.

Darnton, R. (2004). Mademoiselle Bonafon and the private life of Louis XV: Communication circuits in Eighteenth Century France. *Representations* 87, pp. 102-124.

## **Week 10, October 25**

Perspectives on deliberation and public consultation

Cappella, J.N. Zhang, J. & Price, V. (2011). Collective intelligence: The wisdom and foolishness of deliberating groups. In K. Kenski & K.H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*.

Neijens, P. (2012). The deliberating public and deliberative polls. In W. Donsbach & M.W. Traugott (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*.

Fishkin, J. (2009). *When the people speak: Deliberative democracy and public consultation*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1, Democratic Aspirations, pp. 1-31.

Ober, J. (2008). *Democracy and knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1, Introduction: Dispersed knowledge and public action, pp. 1-37.

**Week 11, November 1**

Moral and other panics.

Goode, E. & Ben-Yehuda (1994). Moral panics: Culture, politics and social construction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 20, 149-71.

Gonsalves, G. & Staley P. (2015). Panic, paranoia and public health – The AIDS epidemic’s lessons for Ebola. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 371, 25, 2348-2349.

Blinder, A.S. (2013). The macroeconomic policy paradox: Failing by succeeding. *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences*, 650, November.

Boydston, A.E. et al. (2014). Two faces of media attention: Media storm vs. non-storm coverage. *Political Communication*, 41, 509-531.

Bartels, L.M. (2013). Political effects of the Great Recession. *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences*, 650, November, 47-71.

**Week 12, November 8**

Communication and network effects as dynamic elements in public opinion

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. (2017). *Decoding the social world: Data sciences and the unintended consequences of communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Read pp. 1-98.

**Week 13, November 15**

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. (2017). *Decoding the social world: Data sciences and the unintended consequences of communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Read pp. 99-181.

**Week 14, November 22**

Thanksgiving Holiday. University is closed.

**Week 15, November 29**

Manufacturing public opinion, issues and (mis)perceptions, and their effects.

Oliver, J.E. & Rahn, W.M. (2016). Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 election. *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences*, 667, 189-206.

World Economic Forum. Digital Wildfires.

Dropp, K. & Nyhan, B. (2017). Nearly half of Americans don’t know Puerto Ricans are

fellow citizens. *New York Times*, September 26.

Graff, G.M. (2017). A guide to Russia's high tech toolbox for subverting U.S. democracy. *Wired*. August 13.

Confessore, N. & Wakabayashi, D. (2017). How Russia harvested American rage to reshape U.S. policy. *The New York Times*, October 9.

Mayer, J. (2017). The reclusive hedge-fund billionaire behind the Trump presidency: How Robert Mercer exploited America's populist insurgency. *New Yorker*, March 27.

**Final paper due: Friday, December 7, at noon.**