

## **PUBLIC OPINION & POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

**Grado en Relaciones Internacionales / Bachelor in  
International Relations BIR SEP-2023 PO-IR.3.M.A**

Area Comparative Politics

Number of sessions: 30

Academic year: 23-24

Degree course: THIRD

Number of credits: 6.0

Semester: 1º

Category: COMPULSORY

Language: English

Professor: **DANIEL FLYNN**

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### **Prof. D.J. Flynn**

D.J. Flynn is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Faculty Affiliate at the Center for the Governance of Change at IE University. His research uses quantitative methods to study public opinion and political communication with a particular focus on misinformation and fact-checking. He received his PhD in political science from Northwestern University and held a postdoctoral fellowship with the Program in Quantitative Social Science at Dartmouth College.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours will be on request. Please contact at:

[Dflynn@faculty.ie.edu](mailto:Dflynn@faculty.ie.edu)

## **SUBJECT DESCRIPTION**

????The defining feature of democracy is responsiveness to public opinion. This course examines how citizens form political opinions and how communications from the media, politicians, and other citizens affect this process. Students will also learn about the methodological tools researchers use to study public opinion scientifically. These include surveys, experiments, and a popular platform for programming surveys and experiments (Qualtrics). The course is divided into four parts. The first covers methods. The second covers how citizens form opinions and respond to survey questions. The third examines how recent changes in the political communication environment --- including the rise of social media, fake news, and fact-checking --- have affected opinion formation. Finally, we will apply what we've learned to study how citizens form opinions about several contemporary issues, including immigration, corruption, foreign aid, and democratic backsliding.?

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how citizens often form opinions about political candidates and issues
- Explain and critique major theoretical approaches to studying public opinion
- Describe how communications from the media, politicians, and peers affect opinion formation
- Design valid surveys and experiments to study public opinion
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in empirical arguments about politics

## TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The course will contain a mix of lectures, in-class activities and presentations, and asynchronous activities.

Learning Activity	Weighting	Estimated time a student should dedicate to prepare for and participate in
Lectures	30.0 %	45.0 hours
Discussions	16.67 %	25.0 hours
Exercises in class, Asynchronous sessions, Field Work	20.0 %	30.0 hours
Group work	6.67 %	10.0 hours
Individual studying	26.67 %	40.0 hours
TOTAL	100.0 %	150.0 hours

## PROGRAM

### SESSIONS 1 - 2 (LIVE IN-PERSON)

Sustainability Topics:

- Governance
- Social Challenge

### **Preliminaries, intro to survey and experimental methods**

*Other / Complementary Documentation: Course syllabus. (Please read the entire syllabus and note any questions you have about course policies. I will answer them during this session.)*

*Multimedia Material: Frequently Asked Questions. Read the bulleted entries under "About the ESS," "Methodology," and "Data." (European Social Survey)*

*Multimedia Documentation: ESS Topline Series. Read one of the reports under "Topline Findings" that interests you. Come prepared to discuss. (European Social Survey)*

*Book Chapters: Experiments: An Introduction to Core Concepts., in Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science, Cambridge UP, 2011 (ced)*

Assignment: Set up a Qualtrics account using the instructions posted on the "Additional Documentation" tab. Please do this ASAP in case you need to ask the IT department for help. If you do not set up an account, you will be unable to participate in some upcoming sessions and may get a late start on the survey experiment project.

## **SESSIONS 3 - 4 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

### **S3: Psychology of the survey response**

### **S4: Qualtrics tutorial**

*Article: "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." (American Journal of Political Science , Aug., 1992, Vol. 36, No. 3) (CED)*

*Article: "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties." (American Journal of Political Science , Aug., 1993, Vol. 37, No. 3) (CED)*

*Multimedia Material: Video: Qualtrics Beginner Tutorial (Youtube)*

If you haven't already, set up a Qualtrics account using the instructions posted on the "Additional Documentation" tab. Please do this ASAP in case you need to ask the IT department for help. If you do not set up an account, you will be unable to participate in some upcoming sessions and may get a late start on the survey experiment project.

## **SESSIONS 5 - 6 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

### **Non-attitudes**

*Book Chapters: The Illusion of Public Opinion: Fact and Artifact in American Public Opinion Polls. Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield. Chapters 2 (start at p. 22) and 3 (all). (Book)*

*Article: The twilight of the polls? A review of trends in polling accuracy and the causes of polling misses. Government and Opposition, 53(4), 757-790. Prosser, C., & Mellon, J. (2018). (Government and Opposition)*

Activity: find and critique poorly designed survey questions

## **SESSIONS 7 - 8 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**In-class workshopping of Qualtrics experiments****SESSIONS 9 - 10 (LIVE IN-PERSON)****Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S9: Partisanship****S10: Political knowledge**

*Book Chapters: Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1 (stop at p. 21). (Book)*

*Article: "Institutional Context, Cognitive Resources, and Party Attachments Across Democracies." Political Analysis. Skip the section called "Estimating Interactive Effects with a Two-Step Model" (p. 376–379). (Political Analysis (2005) 13:365–386) (CED)*

*Book Chapters: Democracy and Political Ignorance: Why Smaller Government Is Smarter. Introduction (skim); Chapters 3, 4. (ced)*

Assignment: take the anonymous survey (link posted as an announcement on the course homepage).

**SESSIONS 11 - 12 (LIVE IN-PERSON)****Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S11: Collective rationality****S12: Misinformation and conspiracy theories**

*Book Chapters: The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Introduction; Chapters 1, 2 (skim); Conclusion (CED)*

*Article: "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics." (Political Psychology v38 nS1 (Feb 2017) 127-150) (ced)*

*Article: "Los Agujeros Negros del 11-M." (English version posted on the course website) (El Mundo.com)*

**SESSIONS 13 - 14 (LIVE IN-PERSON)****Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**Misinformation/conspiracy theory presentations****SESSIONS 15 - 16 (LIVE IN-PERSON)****Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S15: Catch up and exam Q&A**

**S16: Exam 1**

## **SESSIONS 17 - 18 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S17: Agenda-setting and framing**

**S18: Media fragmentation and selective exposure**

*Book Chapters: News that Matters: Television and American Opinion. Chapters 3, Chicago: University of Chicago Press Book (ced)*

*Book Chapters: News that Matters: Television and American Opinion. Chapters 7. Chicago: University of Chicago Press Book (Book) (IE Library)*

*Article: "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." (American Journal of Political Science) (CED)*

*Article: "Echo-chambers in Online News Consumption: Evidence from Survey and Navigation Data in Spain." (European Journal of Communication) (CED)*

## **SESSIONS 19 - 20 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**S19: Social media and fake news**

**S20: Fact-checking**

*Article: "Less than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook." (Science Advances)*

*Article: "Countering Fake News: A Survey of Recent Global Initiatives." Policy report, Nanyang Technological University. (RSIS Report)*

*Article: International Fact-Checking Network. Read the bulleted list of core functions. (Poynter/IFCN)*

*Article: "Fact-Checkers Around the World Agree on Shared Code of Principles." (Poynter/IFCN)*

*Multimedia Documentation: Code of Principles. (Web)*

## **SESSIONS 21 - 22 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**Fact-checking presentations**

## **SESSIONS 23 - 24 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S23: Public opinion on immigration**

**S24: Public opinion on corruption**

Article: "How Economic, Humanitarian, and Religious Concerns Shape European Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers." *Science*. (LSE Research online) (ced)

Article: "Corruption Information and Vote Share: A Meta-Analysis and Lessons for Experimental Design." (*American Political Science Review*) (CED)

## **SESSIONS 25 - 26 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S25: Public opinion on foreign aid and redistribution**

**S26: Public opinion towards democracy**

Article: "Misperceptions of Relative Affluence and Support for International Redistribution." (*Journal of Politics*) (CED)

Article: "Polarization versus Democracy." (*Journal of Democracy*, July 2019)

## **SESSIONS 27 - 28 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**S27: Activity (#BadTakes about public opinion and political communication)**

**S28: Course wrap-up and exam Q&A**

Article: "Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't." (*The Forum*) (CED)

Please come to class with any questions about the exam (next session).

## **SESSION 29 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**Exam 2**

## **SESSION 30 (ASYNCHRONOUS)**

### **Sustainability Topics:**

- Governance
- Social Challenge

**ASYNCHRONOUS ACTIVITY: Evaluating public opinion in country of your choice**

Instructions posted on Blackboard

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Final grades will reflect the following components:

- **Exam 1.** Covers content from the first half of the course.
- **Exam 2.** Cumulative exam covering content from entirety of course. More info about focus on

pre- and post-midterm material will be provided in class.

- **Activities/presentations.** During some sessions, students will complete Qualtrics-related assignments or give group presentations.

criteria	percentage	Learning Objectives	Comments
Exam 1	35 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Explain how citizens often form opinions about political candidates and issues</li><li>- Explain and critique major theoretical approaches to studying public opinion</li><li>- Describe how communications from the media, politicians, and peers affect opinion formation</li><li>- Identify strengths and weaknesses in empirical arguments about politics</li></ul>	Mid-term exam

UNIVERSITY

Exam 2	45 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain how citizens often form opinions about political candidates and issues</li> <li>- Explain and critique major theoretical approaches to studying public opinion</li> <li>- Describe how communications from the media, politicians, and peers affect opinion formation</li> <li>- Identify strengths and weaknesses in empirical arguments about politics</li> </ul>	Cumulative final exam
Activities/presentations	20 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain and critique major theoretical approaches to studying public opinion</li> <li>- Design valid surveys and experiments to study public opinion</li> </ul>	Average grade across all activities/presentations

## RE-SIT / RE-TAKE POLICY

### THIRD CALL POLICY:

Any student in their third call of a course, also known as a "Retaker" or "Re-Sit", is obliged to observe the following rules:

- Third call students must contact their professors before or during the first session to ask which work and or \*sessions will be required to obtain a passing grade. The professor will determine which work will be required in their course.  
\*(e.g. when presenting group work, sitting for examinations or other work done in class).
- Retakers are exempt from failing the call due to absences; however, they are not exempt from work the professor designates as necessary to obtain a passing grade. This means some sessions may be mandatory to attend in order to complete the work within.
- Students in their third call are responsible for managing the conflicts in their schedule, should students need advice on how to manage their conflicts they should visit the program office.



### **EXTRAORDINARY EXAMINATION POLICY:**

Any student whose weighted final grade is below 5 will be required to sit for the extraordinary exam to pass the course (except those not complying with the attendance rules, whom are banned from this possibility).

Grading for retakes will be subject to the following rules:

- The extraordinary call will consist of a comprehensive exam or equivalent assignment. The grade will depend only on the performance on this exam; continuous evaluation over the semester will not be taken into account.
- Dates and location of the retakes will be posted in advance and will not be changed.
- The exam/assignment will be designed bearing in mind that the passing grade is 5 and the maximum grade that can be attained is 8 out of 10.

### **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

Each student has four attempts over two consecutive academic years to pass this course.

For every BIR Program mandatory class aside from the IR Unplugged and BIR Electives, students are required to obtain the minimum grade of 5 required to pass the course. Students whose grade in the Final Exam (or the largest assignment) is below 5 will fail the course. The rule applies to whichever assignment carries the greatest weight to the final grade.

Dates and location of the final exam will be posted in advance and will not be changed.

Students must attend at least 70% of the sessions. Students who do not comply with the 70% attendance rule will receive a 0.0 on their first and second attempts and go directly to the third one (they will need to enroll in this course again the following academic year).

Students who are in the third or fourth attempt must contact the professor during the first two weeks of the course. The Bachelor's in International Relations pursues to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes for bringing transformative and sustainable change in today's world. Therefore, all the courses follow the principles of sustainability and diversity. Firstly, this course considers the agenda 2030 and builds upon the Sustainable Development Goal X, Y and Z (Define goals). Secondly, this course is committed to an inclusive learning environment and looks to be enriched and enhanced by diversity along numerous dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

#### **Recommended**

- George F Bishop. (2005). *The illusion of public opinion : fact and artifact in American public opinion polls*. Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield,. ISBN 9780742516458 (Printed)
- Bradley Palmquist, Eric Schickler. (2008). *Partisan Hearts and Minds : Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven, CT : Yale University Press. ISBN 9780300132007 (Printed)
- Bryan Caplan. (2011). *The Myth of the Rational Voter : Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies - New Edition*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press,. ISBN 9781400828821 (Printed)
- Shanto IyengarDonald R Kinder. (2010). *News that matters : television and American opinion*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press. ISBN 9780226388588

(Printed)

## BEHAVIOR RULES

Please, check the University's Code of Conduct [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

**The program fully supports the professor in enforcing any rules and policies.**

- Be aware that the IE University code of conduct specifically states that, "The use of laptops during lectures must be authorized by the professor".
- It is the students' responsibility to fully read and understand the code of conduct, attendance, and ethics policies of this university.
- Students breaking these rules and policies face disciplinary action.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

Please, check the University's Attendance Policy [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

Please do not contact your professor about attendance apart from notifying them out of courtesy, all attendance related inquiries should be directed to the program office ( [bir.biemadrid@ie.edu](mailto:bir.biemadrid@ie.edu) or [bir.biesegovia@ie.edu](mailto:bir.biesegovia@ie.edu) ).

## ETHICAL POLICY

Please, check the University's Ethics Code [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

For help with academic writing contact the Writing Center at [writingcenter@faculty.ie.edu](mailto:writingcenter@faculty.ie.edu)