

POSC 146
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Term Paper

Directions: The paper should be 8-10 pages in length (not including references/graphs/table), 12 point Times New Roman, 1 inch margins all around, and double spaced. You will want to develop a thesis statement and support your arguments with evidence grounded in the literature and data. You may use the texts in class, but also data/literature from outside of the class. The paper is worth 35 percent of your final grade. Below are some paper topics to which a few more will be added in 2-3 weeks; if you are burning to write a paper outside of these proposed topics, please see me during my office hours or email me your thoughts.

1. Philip Converse (1964) is famous in public opinion circles for advancing the non-attitudes thesis. Trace the contours of Converse's findings, his methodology, and the critiques leveled against him. You may want to refer especially to Zaller (1992) and to Page and Shapiro (1992). In the end, do you think Converse is right in his assessment American public opinion?
2. Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1997) find that American voters on average do not know much about politics. Trace their findings and relate their results to classical, elite, and participatory theories of democracy. Based on these findings (DC & K), and perhaps critiques of these findings, which model of democracy do you think is most feasible in the United States? If you say elite democratic theory, do you think we will every see a more participatory form of government? Why or why not?
3. Do voters tend to have stable political attitudes? Discuss the various ways that attitude instability is measured? What types of issues does the public tend to have greater types of stability on and why? And why might attitude instability pose serious problems to our democratic form of government?
4. Research shows that question wording, context, and other measurement issues may have a huge impact on the outcome of survey results. Examining questionnaire design, sampling, data collection and interviewing, weighting, and voter modeling strategies, why might survey results vary by polling firm?
5. Recently, the Census reported that for the first time African-Americans voted at higher rates than whites, while Latinos and Asian Pacific-Islander Americans continued to lag behind in turnout. At the same time, the share of Latinos and Asians now make up a larger portion of the electorate than at any previous time in history. Using research on public opinion, exit polls, and other polls, discuss what these changes might me for the future of American politics. Why might these demographic shifts spell trouble for the Republican Party?

6. The Active Audience Theory maintains that Fox News and MSNBC are probably not responsible for growing polarization among the American mass public. Do you agree or disagree? Why? In your answer, be sure to trace the logic, methods, and evidence Arceneaux and Johnson present in their book. Juxtapose these findings against survey data that indicates otherwise. To rebut A&J's argument, you may also need to include evidence from news articles.

7. The way Americans – and indeed the world – consume political information has changed over time beginning with print, to broadcast television, cable news, and now online. Is the shift to greater media fragmentation a boon for democracy now that most Americans can get information from any source when they want it? Or is it a threat to democracy? In your answer, be sure to address changes in political knowledge, selection effects, and whether the internet enhances the likelihood of citizen engagement.