

PLAP 2270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Spring 2013

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Wilson Hall 402

Course web page: <https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/>

Professor Nicholas Winter

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S385 Gibson Hall

office hours:

Wednesday 3:30-4:30 & by appointment

Teaching Assistants

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This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system, and will emphasize both how citizens' thinking about politics is shaped and the role of public opinion in political campaigns, elections, and government. While the course will focus on research on the current state of public opinion, throughout the course we will also discuss historical developments in opinion and its place in politics, including changes that arose with the development of polling and with the advent of television and other new media. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion *should* play in American democracy.

Course Requirements

Requirements for this course include:

- attendance and participation in *section*,
- a *midterm quiz* in class,
- a public opinion *research project*, that includes a written proposal, a research instrument, a summary of preliminary findings, and a final research paper,
- a comprehensive *final examlet*, and
- additional writing assignments, quizzes, and the like as part of your section.

The assignments for the research paper will be posted to Collab and announced in lecture.

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

Item	Percentage	Date
Section participation	20 percent	—
Midterm quiz	10 percent	March 6, in lecture
Final examlet	20 percent	May 9, 9am-12noon
Research proposal	5 percent	February 6
Research instrument	10 percent	February 27
Summary of preliminary findings	10 percent	April 17
Final research paper	25 percent	May 3 at 5pm

Note however, that you cannot pass the course without receiving a passing grade on each of these items individually. Thus, for example, if you do not turn in a research proposal you will not pass the course no matter how well you do on the remaining items.

Readings

There is one required book for this course:

Berinsky, Adam J. (editor). 2011. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

The book is scheduled to arrive at the bookstore by January 16. I will post on Collab copies of the first chapter, which we read the first week. The book is, of course, also available from online retailers.

All other readings for the course are available through Collab and/or links on the syllabus.

Sections

The section meetings will provide an opportunity for you to clarify material from the course, discuss the lectures, readings, and current events, and work on your research project. Your TA will also assign periodic brief written work in or out of section.

Attendance at your weekly section meeting is required. This requirement is reflected, in part, in the 20% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section.

Sections *will* meet the first week.

Sections will not meet April 10–12 because we will be at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Chicago. We will, however, hold lecture as scheduled on April 10.

Other Policies

We respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious discrimination; and all forms of harassment.

If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you must contact the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (<http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lhec.html>) as soon as possible, at least two to three weeks before any assignments are due. We take learning disabilities very seriously and we will make whatever accommodations you need to be successful in this class but they must be properly documented by the LNEC.

Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own without giving proper credit to the source. You are responsible for not plagiarizing and are expected to abide by the University of Virginia Honor Code (see <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/proc/fraud.html>).

Assignments turned in late without prior arrangement with your TA will not be considered for a grade.

Course Schedule and Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

January 14: Welcome and introduction to the course

Berinsky, Adam. "Introduction." *Reader*

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT

January 16: What is "public"? What is "opinion"? Does "public opinion"="public"+"opinion"?

Herbst, Susan. "The History and Meaning of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 1.

January 21: No Class – MLK Day

January 23, 28, and 30: Measurement and analysis

Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges." *Reader*, chapter 2.

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 3 and 8 ("Wording and Context of Questions" and "Analyzing and Interpreting Polls").

Mueller, John E. 1994. *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, chapter 1 (1-11).

Hochschild, Jennifer. 1981. *What's Fair*, 17-26.

Note that a number of additional readings on different approaches to measuring public opinion are listed in a separate Collab document and are on reserve at Clemons.

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

February 4: The public's political information and sophistication

"Dunce Cap Nation." *Newsweek*. September 4, 2007. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/39529>

Gilens, Martin. "Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance." *Reader*, chapter 3.

February 6: Acceptance of democratic norms: the case of political tolerance

Chong, Dennis. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties" *American Journal of Political Science* 37(3):867-899

Wright, Robert. 2011. "Opinionator: First Comes Fear."

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/11/before-hatred-comes-fear/>

Final Project Proposal due

February 11: Ideology and the organization of opinion

Federico, Christopher M. "Ideology and Public Opinion." *Reader*, chap. 4.

Press, Andrea L., and Elizabeth R. Cole. 1999. *Speaking of Abortion: Television and Authority in the Lives of Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapter 1 (1-24).

IV. INDIVIDUAL OPINION

February 13: Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

Wilson, Timothy D. 2002. *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Chapter 6 (117-135).

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2005. "The Warren Harding Error: Why We Fall For Tall, Dark, and Handsome Men." In *Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown, Chapter 3 (72-98).

February 18: Self interest

Bartels, Larry M. 2004. "Unenlightened Self-Interest: The Strange Appeal of the Estate Tax Repeal." *The American Prospect* 15(6):A17-A19.

February 20: Groups I—political parties

Hetherington, Marc. "Partisanship and Polarization." *Reader*, chapter 5.

February 25: Groups II—race and gender

Burns, Nancy and Donald R. Kinder. "Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 7.

February 27: Core values

Brewer, Paul R. 2003. "The Shifting Foundations of Public Opinion About Gay Rights." *Journal of Politics* 65(4):1208-20.

Final Project Instrument due

March 4: Race and campaigns

We will watch the beginning of the movie *Boogie Man* in lecture. You are responsible for watching the rest of the movie before your section meeting this week. (Available online through Collab)

Junn, Jane, Tali Mendelberg, and Erica Czaja. "Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 6.

March 6: Midterm examination in class

March 11 & 13: No class – spring break

March 18: Emotion

Brader, Ted. "The Emotional Foundations of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 9.

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

March 20 & 25: John Zaller's theory of opinion formation and expression

Zaller, John. 1994. "Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War," In *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. Lance Bennett and David Paletz, chapter 9 (186-209).

March 27: Political campaigns

Sides, John and Jake Haselswerdt. "Campaigns and Elections." *Reader*, chap. 11.

April 1 & 3: Campaigns & the media

We will watch the movie *Journeys with George* in lecture.

April 8: The media

Baum, Matthew. "Media, Public Opinion, and Presidential Leadership." *Reader*, chap. 12.

Mayer, Jane. 2007 (February 19). "Whatever It Takes: The Politics of the Man Behind '24.'" *The New Yorker* 83(1). http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa_fact_mayer

April 10: Framing

Price, Vincent, Lilach Nir, and Joseph N. Cappella. 2005. "Framing Public Discussion of Gay Civil Unions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(2):179-212.

April 10–13: No sections this week

VII. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

April 15: Collective opinion

Zaller, John R. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, ed. W. L. Bennett, and Robert M. Entman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 252-78.

Bartels, Larry M. 2008. "The Irrational Electorate." *Wilson Quarterly* 32(4):44-50.

April 17 & 22: Representation—how does (does?) opinion affect policy?

Campbell, Andrea Louise. "Public Opinion and Public Policy." *Reader*, chapter 271.

April 17: Final Project summary of preliminary findings due

April 24: Back to the Future

We will watch the movie *Magic Town* in lecture. If possible, we will start the movie on Monday, 4/22 and finish it on 4/24. Otherwise, you are responsible for watching the rest of the movie before your section meeting this week. (Available online through Collab)

April 29: Conclusions: Public opinion and American democracy

Ginsberg, Benjamin. 1986. *The Captive Public*, chapter 3 (59-85).

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, epilogue (310-332).

Sears, David O. "Conclusion: Assessing Continuity and Change." *Reader*.

May 3: Final Paper due by 5pm

You must turn in both:

- Hard copy to your TA's mailbox, first floor Gibson Hall
- Electronic copy via Collab

May 9: Final Examlet (9:00am–noon)