

PLAP 3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Spring 2015

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Nau Hall 101

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

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office hours:
Wednesday 12:00–1:30pm
& by appointment

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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.

Important note: This course was previously numbered as PLAP2270. You cannot receive credit for this course if you already took it under the old number.

Course Requirements

Requirements for this course include:

- attendance and participation in *section*,
- a *midterm* administered on Collab,
- a comprehensive *final*, administered on Collab
- a series of in-section and at-home research projects as part of section
- a final reflective paper on the section research project
- (optional) participation in on-line discussion through the Forum section on Collab

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

Item	Percentage	
Section participation	11 percent	
In-section research mini-projects	39 percent	(13 point for each of three projects)
Final reflective essay	10 percent	
Midterm	20 percent	
Final	20 percent	

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 complete part of the in-section research project, you will not pass the course no matter how well you do on the remaining items.

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

Readings

There are two required books for this course:

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

Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The books should be available from the UVa bookstore and the usual online sources. All other readings for the course are available through Collab and/or links on the syllabus. Each TA will assign a number of additional required readings over the course of the term.

Sections

The bulk of section will be devoted to completing a series of three research mini-projects that use different methods to collect and analyze data about public opinion in the area of income inequality in the U.S. Over the semester you will design, execute, and analyze studies that use in-depth personal interviews, a focus group, and a content analysis of public discourse to explore opinion in this issue area.

Attendance at your weekly section meeting is required. This requirement is reflected, in part, in the 10% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section, and the additional 39% from the in-section research mini-projects. If you are deathly ill, we and your fellow students prefer that you *not* attend; otherwise you are expected to be there. If you do miss a section, you are responsible for all the material covered and the research project work that you missed.

Sections *will* meet the first week.

Collab Forum

The course Collab site includes a Forum section. Here you can ask questions (and answer others' questions!) and discuss material from lecture and the readings. The professor and TAs will visit the forum regularly, and we encourage you to do the same. While taking part is voluntary, exemplary participation will positively influence your section participation grade.

Tests

The midterm and final will both be administered via Collab. They will be timed, closed-book, and (of course) subject to the Honor Code. The midterm will be 60 minutes long; the final will be 2.5 hours. Each test will be available through Collab for a several-day window—you must take the exam during one single sitting at a time of your choosing during that window. You should plan your time so that you can *finish* the exam before the window closes, and you should read and carefully attend to Collab's tips on taking online tests, which are available here: <http://goo.gl/P7uube>.

The midterm and final will be multiple-choice format, and will focus on the material from reading and lecture. The final will be comprehensive. Last year's midterm and final will be posted to Collab so you have some sense of what to expect.

Other Policies

We respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to students with physical, visual, hearing, and other disabilities or impairments; 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. However, they must be properly documented by the LNEC and we must have enough notice to make appropriate arrangements.

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/what-is-academic-fraud-2/>). Note that we employ plagiarism detection software to help ensure the integrity of the course.

If you or someone you know is struggling with gender, sexual, or domestic violence, there are many community and University of Virginia resources available. [The Office of the Dean of Students](#): 434- 924-7133 (or after hours and weekends [434-924-7166](tel:434-924-7166) for the University Police Department; ask them to refer the issue to the Dean on Call), [Sexual Assault Resources Agency](#) (SARA) hotline: 434-977-7273 (24/7), [Shelter for Help in Emergency](#) (SHE) hotline: 434-293-8509 (24/7), and [UVA Women's Center](#): 435-982-2361. If you prefer to speak anonymously and confidentially over the phone to UVA student volunteers, call [Madison House's HELP Line](#) (24/7): 434-295-8255.

As your teachers and as people, know that we care about your well-being and stand ready to provide support and resources as we can. As a faculty member and graduate teaching assistants, we are "Responsible Employees," which means that we are required by University policy and federal law to report anything you tell us about sexual violence to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator's job is to ensure that the reporting student receives the resources and support that they need, while also reviewing the information presented to determine whether further action is necessary to ensure the safety of you and the University community. If you would rather keep information confidential, there are "Confidential Employees" you can talk to on Grounds (http://www.virginia.edu/justreportit/confidential_resources.pdf). The worst possible situation would be for you or your friend to remain silent when there are so many here willing and able to help.

- § indicates a reading that focuses primarily on the *research method* for the current section mini-project. In addition, the syllabus includes substantive material that employs the method you are using in your projects.

Lecture Schedule and Outline

Section Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

January 12: Welcome and introduction to the course

Berinsky, Adam. "Introduction." *Reader*

Desilver, Drew. 2013. "The Many Ways to Measure Economic Inequality."

Pew Research Center. Available at:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/18/the-many-ways-to-measure-economic-inequality/>

Berube, Alan. 2014. "All Cities Are Not Created Unequal." Brookings

Institution, Metropolitan Opportunity Series, no. 51. Available at:

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/02/cities-unequal-berube>

(additional readings TBA)

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF OPINION

January 14: What is "public opinion"? Why is that a hard question?

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

January 19: No Class – MLK Day

January 21, 26, and 28: Measurement and analysis

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

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

§ Lane, Robert Edwards. 1962. *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does*. New York: Free Press. Introduction and Appendix A (1-11 & 481-493)

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).

§ Chong, Dennis. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties" *American Journal of Political Science* 37(3):867-899. (Skim this now, focusing on the method; we will see it again in the tolerance unit.)

Jan 14-16:

Section welcome & introduction

Jan 21-23:

In-depth Interviewing I (introduction)

Jan 28-30:

In-depth Interviewing II (protocol work)

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

February 2: 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.

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (1):15-32.

February 4: 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/>

Feb 4-6:

In-depth Interviewing III
(data collection)

February 9: Ideology and the organization of opinion

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

Lane, Robert E. 1962. *Political Ideology: Why the Common Man Believes What He Does*. New York: Free Press, chapters 4 & 22. (You can skim chapter 4 to get a feel for the view that Lane's interviews give us about political reasoning; then focus on chapter 22 where he interprets his findings.)

IV. ROOTS OF INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS

February 11: 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).

Feb 11-13:

In-depth Interviewing IV
(presentation & discussion)

February 16: 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 18: Groups I—political parties

Hetherington, Marc. “Partisanship and Polarization.” *Reader*, chapter 5.

§ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapters 1-2 & Appendix A.

§ Delli Carpini, Michael X, and Bruce Williams. 1994. “The Method Is the Message: Focus Groups as a Method of Social, Psychological, and Political Inquiry.” *Research in micropolitics* 4:57-85.

§ 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) & Appendix A.

February 23: Groups II—race and gender

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

Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 5.

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

February 25: Core values

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

March 2: Emotion

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

Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 3.

March 4: Where have we been, where are we going?

Movie in lecture: “Magic Town”

Midterm exam on Collab

March 9 & 11: No class – spring break

Feb 18-20:

Focus Group I
(introduction)

Feb 25-27:

Focus Group II (protocol
work)

Mar 4-6: Focus Group III
(data collection)

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

March 16 & 18: 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).

Mar 18-20:

Focus Group IV
(presentation &
discussion)

March 23: The media

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

§ Gilens, Martin. 1996. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60 (4):515-41.

March 25: Content Analysis and the Climate of Opinion

§ Tankard, James W., Jr. 2001. "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing." In *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy and August E. Grant. Mahwah, N.J. : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 95-105.

§ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, Appendix C.

March 30: Framing

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

Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 7.

April 1 & 6: Campaigns & Elections

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

April 8: Topics in Media, Campaigns, and Elections

Guest lecture

Mar 25-27:

Media Content Analysis I
(introduction)

Apr 1-3:

Media Content Analysis
II (coding guide work)

Apr 8-10:

Media Content Analysis
III (data collection)

VI. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

April 13: 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 15 & 20: Representation—how does (does?) opinion affect policy?
Campbell, Andrea Louise. “Public Opinion and Public Policy.” *Reader*,
chapter 271.

Soroka, Stuart N., and Christopher Wlezien. 2008. “On the Limits to
Inequality in Representation.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 41 (02):319-
27.

Gilens, Martin. 2009. “Preference Gaps and Inequality in Representation.”
PS: Political Science & Politics 42 (02):335-41.

April 22: Campaigns & Elections II
Movie in lecture: “Journeys with George”

April 27: 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).

Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 10.

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

Apr 15-17: No Section
(Midwest Political
Science Association
Annual Meeting)

Apr 22-24:
Media Content Analysis
IV (presentation &
discussion) and section
wrap-up