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:

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

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:


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/lnec.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”?

January 21: No Class – MLK Day

January 23, 28, and 30: Measurement and analysis
Asher, Polling and the Public, chapters 3 and 8 (“Wording and Context of Questions” and “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls”).

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

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

Final Project Proposal due

February 11: Ideology and the organization of opinion
IV. INDIVIDUAL OPINION

February 13: Implicit and Explicit Attitudes


February 18: Self interest

February 20: Groups I—political parties

February 25: Groups II—race and gender

February 27: Core values

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)


March 6: Midterm examination in class

March 11 & 13: No class – spring break

March 18: Emotion
V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

March 20 & 25: John Zaller’s theory of opinion formation and expression
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March 27: Political campaigns
---

April 1 & 3: Campaigns & the media
---
We will watch the movie *Journeys with George* in lecture.

April 8: The media
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April 10: Framing
---

April 10–13: No sections this week

VII. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

April 15: Collective opinion
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April 17 & 22: Representation—how does (does?) opinion affect policy?
---

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  
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)