Survey Research Methods  
Dr. Shannon C McGregor  
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Mondays | 12:30 – 3:15pm | Carroll Rm 338 and also hopefully outside once it cools down

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Office Hours: By appointment, I am on campus every day but Wednesdays. I am also happy to schedule Zoom meetings whenever. You can find me in Carroll Hall, 378.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

How can you conduct surveys so that they provide meaningful insights into thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors? How should you write survey questions so that respondents understand them and that those responses generate useful data about relevant topics? How should you decide whom to interview and how to interview them? This course will provide you with the necessary tools to design your own surveys as well as to critically assess surveys conducted by others.

That being said, surveys are one *particular* way to study public opinion. For most of the last century, surveys have dominated the measure of public opinion. But public opinion, as necessary a concept it is to the underpinnings of democracy, is a socially constructed representation of the public that is forged by the methods and data from which it is derived, as well as how it is understood by those tasked with evaluating and utilizing it.

In this seminar, we will merge a fundamental understanding of what we can, and cannot, learn about the public from surveys with a critical look at the functioning of the tool itself in our democracy – and in the academy.

**OBJECTIVES**

* Understand the type of questions that survey data and polling can answer
* Write survey questions and questionnaires that correspond to accepted “best practices” in the field
* Identify sources of error and bias in surveys
* Understand how sampling procedures enable estimation of population parameters and evaluate the implications of differences in sampling techniques
* Evaluate the quality of surveys in terms of sampling, interviewing procedures, and questionnaire content
* Apply methodological and substantive knowledge from the course to the design and implementation of an original survey *or* analysis of secondary polling data

**REQUIRED MATERIALS**

Groves, R. M.; Fowler, F. J.; Couper, M. P.; Lepkowski, J. M.; Singer, E. & Tourangeau, R. (2009). *Survey Methodology.* Second edition. New York: Wiley-Interscience.

Can be purchased, new or used – is also available for free as [an e-book](https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=819140) through UNC libraries.

In addition to this book, you will find weekly required readings from journals and book chapters. All should be accessible to you via the UNC library, but where they are not, you will find a PDF on Sakai.

Other books that are *not* required but that you may find interesting or useful if public opinion is your jam:

Herbst, S. (1998). *Reading public opinion: How political actors view the democratic process*. University of Chicago Press.

Herbst, S. (1993). *Numbered voices: How opinion polling has shaped American politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Routledge.

Key, V. O. (1961). *Public opinion and American democracy*. Knopf.

Luker, K. (2008). *Salsa dancing into the social sciences*. Harvard University Press.

Mutz, D. C. (1998). *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes*. Cambridge University Press.

Price, V. (1992). *Public opinion* (Vol. 4). Sage.

Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

**GRADING**

Grading scale

The graduate scale (H, P, L, F) is in effect for all assignments for this seminar. Here are the criteria:

● H = Your very best work. You have read and critically engaged with all materials. Your class participation demonstrates the ability to apply the materials, extrapolate ideas, expand the material into new areas of thought, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area.

● P = You give commendable effort and present acceptable work. You read and critically engage with all materials. You are able to apply the material and to extrapolate ideas in many instances. Consistently good work done on time. This is the standard grade awarded in MEJO graduate courses.

● L = You read some of the material but do not often critically engage with it. You are able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in some instances.

● F = You do not always read the material and fail to critically engage with it.

Grading rubric

Your overall grade for the course will be based on the following criteria:

Participation – 15%

New research presentation – 10%

Survey assignments – 15%

Research questions – 5%

Literature review & variables – 10%

In-class presentations – 5%

Final paper – 40%

Participation

I value the diversity that each person brings to the University of North Carolina. Fifteen percent of your final grade in this class comes from participation. I need your input and believe you can greatly contribute to our discussions. Attendance is important. But, simply showing up to class is not enough – you must be actively involved in class meetings to earn full credit for participation. This is a graduate seminar, and its success depends on consistent participation by all members of the course. You should attend each meeting having completed all the readings and prepared to actively engage in our discussion. This includes coming to class with your own questions and observations about the readings and being ready to interact with your fellow seminar participants. Your grade will be based on the *caliber* of your contribution to discussions – you are expected to ask and answer questions every week.

New research presentation

Once during the semester, you will present to the class a **very** recent article (published since 2019) that builds on the concepts or methods from that week’s reading but is not on the syllabus. As another option, you may also present a new study in your topic/field interest that uses survey methodology (including survey experiments). It is up to you to find and choose the article you would like to present. The presentation will follow a conference-style format, with speakers presenting for about 10-12 minutes (uninterrupted), followed by a Q&A from seminar participants. Presentations should use visual aids and focus on the key theoretical and/or empirical advancements in the article, as well as potential limitations.

Method specific assignments

Throughout the course of the semester, we will complete several hands-on assignments to assist you in working through particulars of survey construction, design, and analysis.

Final project

The main goal of the seminar is to produce work that advances your own research agenda in a way that is useful to you – keep in mind, this means conceptual stretching *or* methodological grounding. While there are two options as to the data, in both cases you will produce a 13- to 15-page paper, like a research note (excluding works cited, figures/tables, and appendices). This will be completed in steps, as follows:

* **Research question(s):** A one-page proposal describing your plan for the final paper should be submitted to me, via email, by *Friday, September 10*. This should focus on your research questions and/or hypotheses. This means an explanation of your research question, including evidence illustrating how it will be possible to address this question with either a) available data or b) original data collection.
  + NOTE: If you are told that the research question(s) you submitted needs further work and refinement (as most will), you must get a new draft approved in consultation with me no later than Friday, September 24.
* **Mini-literature review and matching concepts to variables:** This document should be about 6 – 8 pages. Your concise review should argue towards your research questions, while defining your key concepts. The culmination of this is tying the concepts to either a) variables in existing data sets or b) originally constructed variables. This is due Friday, October 15.
* **In-class presentation I:** You will present your plan – including tying concepts to variables – in a *short* presentation to the class to get their feedback. You will each be allotted 12 minutes of class time, inclusive of your presentation and feedback. This will take place on Monday, October 11.
* **In-class presentation II:** On Monday, November 29 each student will present their project to the class.
* **Final written project:** This document should be no more than 15 pages, excluding works cited, figures and tables, and appendices. This is due Friday, December 10.

**IN CLASS**

There is *plenty* of research suggesting that distractions far outweigh the benefits of technology. I do ask that you silence your phones while we’re “in” class, and that you do your best to stay on task. There are some distractions we can work to avoid (Twitter) and some we might not be able to (children, pets, or other family members intruding physically or virtually).

Our class is a safe environment where I aim to make everyone feel a sense of academic belonging. Discussions should be respectful, and we should strive to help, not compete with, each other. That being said, if you see something, say something: if you notice inappropriate behavior directed at you or anyone else, please let me know immediately. This includes harassment, bullying, disrespectful comments, etc.

Each week, when we meet, I will lead a discussion of the class about the week’s topic and readings. This discussion will take up the bulk of the class period. Next, the student assigned to present a new research presentation will present their additional, but related, study. There will be a brief Q&A session related to the presentation. We will also spend ~30 minutes towards the end of each class talking about the professionalization topic of that day. Students are encouraged to come to class with questions specifically related to that topic as well. Finally, in some class meetings, we will spend some time talking about your own project and how it is progressing – as well as some time doing quiet group writing.

**HONOR CODE**

The Honor Code (<https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/>) forms a bond of trust among students, faculty, and administrators. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill operates under a system of self-governance, as students are responsible for governing themselves. As such, our University is transformed into a powerful community of inquiry and learning. The Honor Code embodies the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship, and governs the performance of all academic work a student conducts at the University. Acceptance of an offer of admission to Carolina presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in our century-old tradition of honor and integrity.

**SEEKING HELP**

If you need individual assistance, it is your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a learning difference, or an illness.

**DIVERSITY**

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined on the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office’s webpage (<https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/>). UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Resources & Services site at <https://ars.unc.edu/>.

**MASK USE**

All enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community – your classmates and me – as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the Office of Student Conduct. At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/university-guidelines-for-facemasks>/.

**WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE**  
\*\*The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

**Week 1 | August 23 – Introductions, the Total Survey Error Approach, and intellectual craftsmanship**

Mills, C. Wright 1959. On intellectual craftsmanship. Appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford

Moy, P., & Murphy, J. (2016). Problems and prospects in survey research. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *93*(1), 16-37.

*On public opinion:*

Blumer, H. (1948). Public opinion and public opinion polling. *American Sociological Review*, *13*(5), 542-549.

*Professionalization:* Introductions

**Week 2 | August 30 – Measurement I: From concept to question, models of measurement, models of survey response, and types of measurement error**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapters 1 and 2

Bogart, L., Beniger, J. R., Brody, R. A., Crespi, I., Davis, J. A., Davison, W. P., ... & Stoezel, J. (1987). The future study of public opinion: A symposium. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *51*, S173-S191. >> read especially: Crespi, Langs

John Zaller and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences." American Journal of Political Science, 36(3):579-616.

*On public opinion:*

Bourdieu, P. (1979). Public opinion does not exist. *Communication and class struggle*, *1*, 124-130.

*Professionalization:* Academic conferences

**Week 3 | September 6 – NO class, Labor Day**

Berinsky, A. J. (2017). Measuring public opinion with surveys. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *20*, 309-329.

Broockman, D. E., & Skovron, C. (2018). Bias in perceptions of public opinion among political elites. *American Political Science Review*, *112*(3), 542-563.

*on public opinion:*

Igo, S. E. (2006). “A gold mine and a tool for democracy”: George Gallup, Elmo Roper, and the business of scientific polling, 1935–1955. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *42*(2), 109-134. \*\* See also Igo’s fantastic book: Igo, S. E. (2007). *The averaged American: Surveys, citizens, and the making of a mass public*. Harvard University Press.

*Professionalization:* CVs & scholarly identity

DUE: Research questions, by Friday, September 10th

**Week 4 | September 13 – Measurement II: Measuring facts & behavior**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapters 7 & 8

*On public opinion:*

Herbst, S. (1993). The meaning of public opinion: citizens' constructions of political reality. *Media, Culture & Society*, *15*(3), 437-454.

*Professionalization:* publishing - journals

**Week 5 | September 20 – Measurement III: Measuring attitudes & subjective states**

George F. Bishop, Alfred Tuchfarber, and R.W. Oldendick. 1986. Opinions on fictitious issues: The pressure to answer survey questions. Public Opinion Quarterly, 50(2):240–250.

Tom Smith. 1987. “That Which We Call Welfare by Any Other Name Would Smell Sweeter: An Analysis of the Impact of Question Wording on Response Patterns.” Public Opinion Quarterly 51:75–83.

Jefferson, Hakeem, The Curious Case of Black Conservatives: Construct Validity and the 7-point Liberal-Conservative Scale (July 6, 2020). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3602209> or [http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3602209](https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3602209)

Druckman, J. N., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Levendusky, M., & Ryan, J. B. (2020). (Mis-) Estimating Affective Polarization. (Recently accepted at the *Journal of Politics*, author copy [here](https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/715603)).

Jesse Lopez and D. Sunshine Hillygus. Why So Serious?: Survey Trolls and Misinformation (March 14, 2018). Available at SSRN: http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3131087.

Scott Clifford and Jennifer Jerit. 2016. Cheating on Political Knowledge Questions in Online Surveys: An Assessment of the Problems and Solutions. Public Opinion Quarterly, 80(4):858–887.

*On public opinion:*

Herbst, S. (1999). Walter Lippmann's Public Opinion, Revisited. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *4*(2), 88-93. \*\* See also, of course, Lippmann, W. (1922). Public opinion.

*Professionalization:* publishing - peer review

DUE: If needed, revised research questions by Friday, September 24th

**Week 6 |September 27 – Measurement IV: Evaluating Questions**

Adam N. Glynn. 2013. What can we learn with statistical truth serum? Design and analysis of the list experiment. Public Opinion Quarterly, 77(S1):159–172.

Markus Prior. 2009. The immensely inflated news audience: Assessing bias in self-reported news exposure. Public Opinion Quarterly, 73(1):130–143.

*On public opinion:*

Herbst, S. (2001). Public opinion infrastructures: Meanings, measures, media. *Political Communication*, *18*(4), 451-464.

*Professionalization:* getting sh\*t done - organization & work flows

**Week 7 | October 4 – Sampling I: The basics of probability sampling**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapters 3 and 4

*on public opinion:*

Krippendorff, K. (2005). The social construction of public opinion. In *Kommunikation über Kommunikation* (pp. 129-149). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

*Professionalization:* public engagement

**Week 8 | October 11 – Mode I: Online Surveys**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapter 5

*on public opinion:*

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (2006). Personal influence and the new paradigm: Some inadvertent consequences. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *608*(1), 157-178.

DUE: In-class mini-presentations on concepts and variables for feedback (12 minutes each)

DUE: Mini-literature review with concepts and variables, Friday, October 15th

**Week 9 | October 18 – Sampling II: Hard-to-reach populations and non-probability sampling**

AAPOR. (2013). The AAPOR task force on non-probability sampling. Retrieved from: <http://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/NPS_TF_Report_Final_7_revised_FNL_6_22_13.pdf>

*on public opinion:*

Van Duyn, E. (2018). Hidden democracy: Political dissent in rural America. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(5), 965-987.

*Professionalization:* types of jobs & the job market

**Week 10 | October 25 – Non-response: causes & effects**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapter 6

Krosnick, J. A., Holbrook, A. L., Berent, M. K., Carson, R. T., Hanemann, W. M., Kopp, R. J., Mitchell, R. C., Presser, S., Ruud, P. A., Smith, K., Moody, W. R., Green, M. C. & Conaway, M. (2002). The impact of" no opinion" response options on data quality: non-attitude reduction or an invitation to satisfice?. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *66*(3), 371-403.

*On public opinion:*

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (1984). The impact of polls on public opinion. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *472*(1), 129-142.

Toff, B. (2018). Exploring the effects of polls on public opinion: How and when media reports of policy preferences can become self-fulfilling prophesies. *Research & Politics*, *5*(4), 2053168018812215.

*Professionalization:* TK TK

**Week 11 | November 1 – Data processing: Cleaning & weighting**

*Survey Methodology* – Chapter 10

Berinsky, Adam J., Michele F. Margolis, and Michael W. Sances. 2014. “Separating the shirkers from the workers? Making sure respondents pay attention on self‐ administered surveys.” American Journal of Political Science 58(3): 739-753

Hillygus, D. Sunshine, Natalie Jackson, and McKenzie Young. 2014. “Professional respondents in nonprobability online panels.” In Online Panel Research: A Data Quality Perspective.

Aronow, Peter M., Josh Kalla, Lilla Orr, and John Ternovski. “Evidence of Rising Rates of Inattentiveness on Lucid in 2020.”

*on public opinion:*

Ramasubramanian, S., & Banjo, O. O. (2020). Critical media effects framework: Bridging critical cultural communication and media effects through power, intersectionality, context, and agency. *Journal of Communication*, *70*(3), 379-400.

*Professionalization:* TK TK

**Week 12 | November 8 – Analyzing data**

NO READING – HANDS ON ANALYSIS & ACTIVITY DAY

**Week 13 | November 15 – Not (only) surveys: Election polling & modeling**

“We Gave Four Good Pollsters the Same Raw Data. They Had Four Different Results.” Nate Cohn. New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/20/upshot/the-error-the-polling-world-rarely-talks-about.html>

Toff, B. (2019). The ‘Nate Silver effect’ on political journalism: Gatecrashers, gatekeepers, and changing newsroom practices around coverage of public opinion polls. *Journalism*, *20*(7), 873-889.

AAPOR REPORT [2020 Pre-Election Polling: An Evaluation of the 2020 General Election Polls](https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/Reports/2020-Pre-Election-Polling-An-Evaluation-of-the-202.aspx)

*on public opinion:*

Patterson, T. E. (2005). Of polls, mountains: US journalists and their use of election surveys. *Public opinion quarterly*, *69*(5), 716-724.

*Professionalization:* TK TK

**Week 14 | November 22 | Not surveys: Social media, “big” data, & other ways of knowing the public**

Schober, M. F., Pasek, J., Guggenheim, L., Lampe, C., & Conrad, F. G. (2016). Social media analyses for social measurement. *Public opinion quarterly*, *80*(1), 180-211.

Tufekci, Z. (2014). Big questions for social media big data: Representativeness, validity and other methodological pitfalls. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1403.7400*.

Freelon, D. (2018). Inferring individual-level characteristics from digital trace data: Issues and recommendations. In *Digital Discussions* (pp. 96-110). Routledge.

Schulz, W., Guess, A., Barbera, P., Munzert, S., Yang, J., Gottlieb, A., Hughes, A., Remy, E., Shah, S., & Smith, A. (2021). (Mis)representing Ideology on Twitter: How Social Influence Shapes Online Political Expression. (unpublished manuscript). <https://events.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/media/attachment/schulzguess_spirals.pdf>

McGregor, S. C. (2020). “Taking the Temperature of the Room” How Political Campaigns Use Social Media to Understand and Represent Public Opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *84*(S1), 236-256.

*On public opinion:*

McGregor, S. C. (2019). Social media as public opinion: How journalists use social media to represent public opinion. *Journalism*, *20*(8), 1070-1086.

Anstead, N., & O'Loughlin, B. (2015). Social media analysis and public opinion: The 2010 UK general election. *Journal of Computer‐Mediated Communication*, *20*(2), 204-220.

*Professionalization:* TK TK

**Week 15 | November 29 – Final project presentations**

DUE: In-class presentations of the final project (Final written project due Friday, December 10th)

**CREDITS:**

Some of the ideas, exercises, and readings in this class were inspired by or adapted from the work of the following people, who were kind enough to share their syllabi, ideas, and/or suggestions. If you are on this list, thank you for being awesome, smart, and generous: Dr. Yanna Krupnikov (Stony Brook University), Dr. Rachel Mourão (Michigan State University), Dr. Mike Wagner (U of Wisconsin), Dr. Dhavan Shah (U of Wisconsin), Dr. Diana Mutz (U of Pennsylvania), Dr. Michael Henderson (LSU), and of course, Dr. Daniel Riffe (U of North Carolina).