

**PLAP 3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Fall 2015**

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Nau Hall 101

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

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Monday 1:00–2:15pm
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Teaching Assistants

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This course examines public opinion and assesses its place in the American political system. It emphasizes 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.

Changelog:

- v1.2.0 - added content analysis readings for September 2, 7, 9 & 14
- v1.3.0 - updated dates in September and October
- v1.4.0 - updated dates October through December to accommodate exam retake
- v1.5.0 - updated November/December readings/topics

Course Requirements

Requirements for this course include:

- attendance and participation in *section*,
- a *midterm* administered on Collab,
- a comprehensive *final*, administered on Collab
- a public opinion *research project*, that includes a written proposal, a research instrument, a summary of preliminary findings, and a final research paper

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

Item	Percentage
Section participation	15 percent
Midterm exam	15 percent
Comprehensive final exam	20 percent
Research project	50 percent
Proposal	5 percent
Research instrument	10 percent
Summary of preliminary findings	10 percent
Final research paper	25 percent

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 may assign a number of additional required readings over the course of the term.

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 15% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section, and the additional 50% from the research project. 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.

Exams

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 Student Disability Access Center (<http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/sdac/sdac.html>) as soon as possible, and 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 SDAC 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.

In addition, I have posted some information on nonacademic support for UVA students here: <https://goo.gl/I1vXzH>.

Lecture Schedule and Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

August 26: Welcome and introduction to the course

Berinsky, Adam. "Introduction." *Reader*

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF OPINION

August 31: What is "public opinion"? Why is that a hard question?

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

September 2, 7, 9, 14, & 16: Conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of public opinion

Survey Research:

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").

In-depth Interviewing:

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)

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.)

Focus Groups:

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

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. (Focus on the method (focus groups); we will see it again in the ideology unit.)

Content Analysis:

Prasad, B. Devi. 2008. "Content Analysis: A Method for Social Science Research." In *Research Methods for Social Work*, ed. D. K. Lal Das and V. Bhaskaran. New Delhi: Rawat, 173-93.

Gilens, Martin. 1996. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60 (4):515-41. (Focus on the method (content analysis); we will see it again in the media unit.)

The following two are optional, but very useful if you are considering a content analysis for your project:

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, William A., and Andre Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach." *American Journal Of Sociology* 95 (1):1-37.

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

September 21: 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.

September 23: 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. (We read this before...take another look, this time focusing on his findings about political tolerance.)

Wright, Robert. 2011. "Opinionator: First Comes Fear." <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/11/before-hatred-comes-fear/>

September 28: 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.)

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). (We read this before...take another look, this time focusing on their findings about political reasoning.)

IV. ROOTS OF INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS

September 30: The political unconscious: 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).

Berinsky, Adam J, Vincent L Hutchings, Tali Mendelberg, Lee Shaker, and Nicholas A Valentino. 2011. "Sex and Race: Are Black Candidates More Likely to Be Disadvantaged by Sex Scandals?" *Political Behavior* 33 (2):179-202.

October 5: No class—UVa reading day

October 7: What is in it for me? Self interest and opinion

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

Bishop, Bradford H. 2014. "Focusing Events and Public Opinion: Evidence from the Deepwater Horizon Disaster." *Political Behavior* 36 (1):1-22.

October 12: Groups I—political parties

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

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.

October 14: 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.

October 19: Core values

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

October 21: Emotion

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

Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 3.

Midterm exam on Collab

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

October 26: Exam retake (no lecture)

October 28 & November 2: 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).

November 4 & 9: 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.

November 11-18: 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.

November 23 & 30: Campaigns & Elections

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

VI. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

November 23: 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.~~

November 25: No class—UVa Thanksgiving break

December 2: The conversation between citizens and government: representation

- 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.

December 7: 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*.