

**PLAP3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior  
Spring 2025**

Monday &amp; Wednesday

10:00–10:50am

Nau Hall 101

**Professor Nicholas Winter**[nwinter@virginia.edu](mailto:nwinter@virginia.edu)

Real office: S385 Gibson Hall

Zoom “office”: <https://virginia.zoom.us/my/nwinter>**office hours**

Wednesday 12–2pm &amp; by appointment

(in-person unless you email in advance to arrange Zoom)

**teaching assistants**Robert Brehm ([rb5as@virginia.edu](mailto:rb5as@virginia.edu))Kathryn Miller ([bez7nk@virginia.edu](mailto:bez7nk@virginia.edu))Zach Watson ([zjw7uj@virginia.edu](mailto:zjw7uj@virginia.edu))Lecture Canvas page: <https://canvas.its.virginia.edu/courses/136628>

This course examines public opinion and assesses its place in the American political system. It emphasizes how citizens learn and think about politics and the role of public opinion plays in politics. 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 a democracy.

The current version of the syllabus is linked from Canvas and also available directly here:

<https://www.nicholasjgwinter.com/assets/syllabi/syllabus.plap3270.2025sp.pdf>.

**syllabus change log**

V25.0.0—1/13/2025	Beta release
v25.0.1—2/6/2025	Fixed office hours (Wednesday 12-2pm)
V25.1.0—2/25/2025	Adjusted schedule and readings from 2/24 forward

## course requirements and grades

1. twice-weekly *lecture*,
2. attendance and participation in *section*,
3. a *midterm* exam,
4. a comprehensive *final* exam, and
5. a semester-long 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	
Proposal	5 percent
Research instrument	10 percent
Summary of preliminary findings	10 percent
Final research paper	25 percent

} 50 percent

**You must submit all components of the research project in order to pass the course.**

You are expected to turn in each component on time, though if something comes up you should make an arrangement with your TA *in advance or as soon as possible*. If you do not make an arrangement, late assignments will receive a zero.

## readings

There are two required books for this course, both of which are automatically available on Canvas through Inclusive Access (IA). You will be automatically billed for access to the electronic version of these books unless you opt out; for more information on Inclusive Access, see the bookstore page:

[https://www.uvabookstores.com/inclusive\\_access](https://www.uvabookstores.com/inclusive_access).

I include Amazon links in case you wish to purchase a hard copy of either:

Berinsky, Adam J. (editor). 2020. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. Third Edition. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-138-48356-9.

This book is referred to as “Reader” in the syllabus.

Inclusive Access cost (automatically billed): \$29.12

Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1138483567/>

Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 978-0-226-34911-4

Inclusive Access cost (automatically billed): \$25.59

Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/022634911X/>

All other readings for the course are available through Canvas and/or links on the syllabus. Each TA may assign additional required readings over the course of the term.

## sections

Section meetings will provide an opportunity for you to clarify material from the course and to discuss the lectures, readings, and current events. A major focus of section is work on your research project. Your TA may 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 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 of class. They will *not* meet on Wednesday–Friday, April 2–4.

## exams

The midterm and final are multiple choice exams designed to test your attention to lecture and readings. They are closed-book and timed. Each will be administered via Canvas during a window as noted below. The final will be comprehensive. I will post a prior midterm on Canvas 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 (<https://www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/sdac>) as soon as possible, and at least two to three weeks before any assignments are due. We take learning differences 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 <https://honor.virginia.edu/academic-fraud>). Note that we may employ plagiarism/AI detection software to help ensure the integrity of the course.

You may not use generative AI in this course, except when specifically and explicitly allowed by the professor or your TA. Or, as Chat GPT puts it: "As we embark on this learning journey, I kindly remind all students that the use of generative AI tools is not permitted for the completion of assignments, projects, or any other course-related activities. Our goal is to foster your personal growth, critical thinking, and creative expression. Embracing the challenges presented in this course will significantly contribute to your skill development and understanding of the subject matter. Your unique perspectives and efforts are highly valued, and I encourage you to engage with the material authentically. Let's work together to create an enriching and equitable learning environment for everyone."

I record my lectures for use by students who are unable to attend due to illness or relevant SDAC accommodations. If you need access to a lecture for one of these reasons, please contact me and I will give you access. Recordings will be deleted when no longer necessary, and may not be reproduced, shared with those not enrolled in the class, or uploaded to other online environments. Per UVa policy, students are prohibited from recording of any kind unless you have a relevant SDAC accommodation or have specific authorization from the instructor.

## **laptops in lecture**

A large body of research demonstrates that multitasking decreases comprehension and performance, that being able to see multitasking degrades *other* students' performance, and that taking notes by hand increases comprehension and learning. Therefore, the use of laptops and other electronic devices is *strongly discouraged* during lecture.

However, I am aware that some students have a learning or other disability that precludes you from taking notes effectively by hand, and others simply prefer to use an electronic device despite the evidence. Therefore, I will designate a "laptop-optional" section of the lecture hall. Laptops and other electronic devices will be allowed *only* in this section of the lecture hall. I expect that electronic devices will be used only for taking notes during lecture—please don't distract yourself or those behind you with other things.

Section rules on the use of laptops and other electronic devices are at the discretion of your TA.

## 0. Welcome

### Mon January 13: Welcome and introduction to the course

Morris, G. Elliott. 2023. "Democracy and the Public Will." In *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them*. New York: Norton. Chapter 1 (11–29).

Strauss, Valerie. 2014. "Why a leading professor of new media just banned technology use in class." *The Washington Post*. September 25. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/25/why-a-leading-professor-of-new-media-just-banned-technology-use-in-class/>

#### Optional, for your information:

Sana, Faria, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Cepeda. 2013. "Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers." *Computers & Education* 62:24–31.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254>

Mueller, Pam A., and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. 2014. "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard." *Psychological Science* 25 (6):1159–68.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797614524581>

## I. Meaning and Measurement of Opinion

### Wed January 15: No lecture

Sections will meet this week

### Mon January 20: No lecture—UVa MLK Holiday

### Wed January 22: What is public opinion?

Morris, G. Elliott. 2023. "Polling Comes of Age." In *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them*. New York: Norton. Chapter 2 (30–54).

### Mon January 27: No lecture

### Wed January 29: The formation and expression of public opinion

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 1 ("Making Sense of Politics through Resentment.")

### Mon February 3: Measuring public opinion—survey research

Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges." *Reader*, chapter 1.

Keeter, Scott. 2023. "Public Opinion Polling Basics." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/course/public-opinion-polling-basics/>

### Wed February 5: Measuring public opinion—in-depth interviewing & focus groups

#### In-depth interviewing:

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 2 ("A Method of Listening"), Appendix B ("Descriptions of Groups") and Appendix C ("Questions Used").

Ternullo, Stephanie. 2022. “I’m Not Sure What to Believe’: Media Distrust and Opinion Formation during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *American Political Science Review* 116(3): 1096–1109.

#### Focus Groups:

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 (pun intended) on the method they use: focus groups.

Riggan, Kirsten A., Richard R. Sharp, and Megan Allyse. 2019. “Where Will We Draw the Line? Public Opinions of Human Gene Editing.” *Qualitative Health Research* 29(12): 1823–35.

### Mon February 10: Measuring public opinion—experiments

Iyengar, Shanto, and Donald R. Kinder. 2010. “Pathways to Knowledge: Experimentation and the Analysis of Television’s Power.” In *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*, updated edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 6-15.

Gross, Kimberly, and Julie Wronski. 2019. “Helping the Homeless: The Role of Empathy, Race and Deservingness in Motivating Policy Support and Charitable Giving.” *Political Behavior* 43: 583–613.

### Wed February 12: Measuring public opinion—content analysis

Zeng, Jing, and Crystal Abidin. 2021. “#OkBoomer, Time to Meet the Zoomers’: Studying the Memefication of Intergenerational Politics on TikTok.” *Information, Communication & Society* 24(16): 2459–81.

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

### Mon February 17: Everything you always wanted to know about research instruments!

### Wed February 19: Using Qualtrics to program your survey

## II. Democratic Competence

### Mon February 24: Democratic competence & political knowledge

Gilens, Martin. “Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance.” *Reader*, chapter 2.

Jerit, Jennifer. “How People Learn About Politics: Navigating the Information Environment.” *Reader*, chapter 12.

### Wed February 26: Systematic ignorance and misinformation

Lilla, Mark. 2024. “The Surprising Allure of Ignorance.” *The New York Times*. December 2.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/02/opinion/ignorance-knowledge-critical-thinking.html>

### Mon March 3: Research Ethics

### Wed March 5: Midterm exam (on Canvas; no lecture)

The midterm is timed, closed-book, and multiple-choice. You will have 50 minutes to complete the exam in one sitting on Canvas. **The exam window will be open from Tuesday, March 4 at noon to Wednesday, March 5 at 4pm.** You may take the exam at any time in the window as long as you finish by 4pm Wednesday.

*The exam will cover all reading and lectures prior to this date.*

If you are entitled to extended time on assessments you will have access to a version of the exam that allows 1.5x or 2x time, as appropriate.

### March 10 & 12: **No class**—Spring Break

### Mon March 17: 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.

Kerr, Benjamin, and Peter Godfrey-Smith. 2017. "After Charlottesville, How We Define Tolerance Becomes a Key Question." *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/after-charlottesville-how-we-define-tolerance-becomes-a-key-question-83793>

### Wed March 19: Ideology and the organization of opinion

Federico, Christopher M. "Ideology and Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 3.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 3 ("The Contours of Rural Consciousness").  
Focus on several things in this chapter: (1) Cramer's method; (2) her understanding of rural consciousness; and (3) the ways rural consciousness might serve as a political "ideology," or a lens for understanding politics.

### Asynchronous Lecture: Data analysis for experimental research

## III. Roots of Individual Opinions

### Mon March 24: The political unconscious: implicit and explicit attitudes

Gonzalez, Frank J., John R. Hibbing, and Kevin B. Smith. "No Longer 'Beyond our Scope.'" *Reader*, chapter 10.

### Wed March 26: What is in it for me? Self-interest

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

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 4 ("The Context of Rural Consciousness").

### Mon March 31: Groups—Political parties, partisanship, & polarization

Iyengar, Shanto. "Affective Polarization or Hostility Across the Party Divide: An Overview" *Reader*, chapter 4.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 5 (“Attitudes toward Public Institutions and Public Employees”).

### **Wed April 2: Groups—Race**

Tesler, Michael. “Racial Attitudes and American Politics.” *Reader*, chapter 5.

### **Mon April 7: Groups—Gender**

Kinder, Donald, Molly E. Reynolds, and Nancy Burns. “Categorical Politics in Action: Gender and the 2016 Presidential Election.” *Reader*, chapter 7.

### **Wed April 9: Emotion**

Brader, Ted. “The Emotional Foundations of Democratic Citizenship.” *Reader*, chapter 9.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 6 (“Support for Small Government”).

## **IV. Opinion In Political Context**

### **Mon April 14 &**

### **Wed April 16: 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).

### **Mon April 21: The media**

Baum, Matthew. “The ‘Daily Them’: Hybridity, Political Polarization, and Presidential Leadership in a Digital Media Age.” *Reader*, chapter 11.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 7 (“Reactions to the Ruckus”).

### **Wed April 23: Framing & the formation of opinion**

Winter, Nicholas J. G. 2005. “Framing Gender: Political Rhetoric, Gender Schemas, and Public Opinion on U.S. Health Care Reform.” *Politics and Gender* 1(3): 453–80.

## **V. Conclusions: Public Opinion and American Politics**

### **Mon April 28: Conclusions—Public opinion, representation, and American democracy**

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 8 (“We Teach These Things to Each Other”).

Sears, David. “Assessing Continuity and Change.” *Reader*, conclusion.

### **Final exam window: Tuesday, May 6 at 6am through Thursday, May 8 at 11:59pm**

Like the midterm, the final is timed, closed-book, online, and multiple-choice. Unlike the midterm, it covers the entire semester.



You will have three hours to complete the exam in one sitting on Canvas. You may take the exam at the time of your choosing during the window listed above. (Note that this window includes the course's official exam slot from 9am–noon on Tuesday, May 6.)

If you are entitled to extended time on assessments you will have access to a version of the exam that allows 1.5x or 2x time, as appropriate.