

**PLAP3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Spring 2026**

Monday & Wednesday

10:00–10:50am

Gilmer Hall 301

Professor Nicholas Winternwinter@virginia.edu

Real office: S385 Gibson Hall

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

Mondays 12–2pm & by appointment

(in-person unless you make prior arrangement for Zoom)

teaching assistantsBen Bottger (xpr3kb@virginia.edu)Robert Brehm (rb5as@virginia.edu)Elizabeth Gilmore (ygf4kr@virginia.edu)Kathryn Miller (bez7nk@virginia.edu)Lecture Canvas page: <https://canvas.its.virginia.edu/courses/165780>

(don't forget that your section has an additional Canvas page!)

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 syllabus is always on Canvas and here:

<https://www.nicholasjgwinter.com/assets/syllabi/syllabus.plap3270.2026sp.pdf>.**syllabus change log**V26.0.0—1/10/2026 Beta release; report bugs to nwinter@virginia.edu

course requirements and grades

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

item	percentage
In-lecture quizzes	25 percent
Section attendance and participation	15 percent
Final research project	
Proposal	5 percent
Research instrument	10 percent
Summary of preliminary findings	10 percent
Final research paper	25 percent
	} 50 percent
Participate in other students' research	10 percent

lecture quizzes: I will give a short quiz during most in-person lectures. Each quiz may cover material from the readings assigned for that lecture, from recent prior lectures, and from the readings associated with recent prior lectures.

section meetings: Section 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. 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.

research project: Over the course of the semester you will complete a comprehensive research project on public opinion, culminating in a research report. Many more details are in a separate assignment document, available very soon.

You must submit all components of the research project in order to pass the course (that is, you can't blow off one of the steps and simply move to the next). 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.

research participation: You will participate in your colleagues' research projects and write a brief reaction essay about the experience. This will involve a mixture of taking brief online surveys, being interviewed one-on-one, and/or participating in focus group discussions. More details coming soon.

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.

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): \$30.18

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): \$30.87

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.

other policies

equal access: We respect and uphold University policies and regulations regarding 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.

SDAC accommodations: 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.

academic honesty: 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.

use of artificial intelligence tools: 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.”

lecture recordings: 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 others, 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, I *strongly discourage* use of laptops and other electronic devices during lecture.

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 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. If you use an electronic device, I expect that you will turn off all notifications (even silent visual ones) and use it only for taking notes during lecture.

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

0. Welcome

Mon January 12: 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 14: 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 19: **No lecture**—UVa MLK Holiday

Wed January 21: The formation and expression of public opinion

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

Mon January 26: 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 January 28: 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 2: 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 4: 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 9: Everything you always wanted to know about research instruments!

Reading TBA

II. Democratic Competence

Wed February 11: 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.

Mon February 16: Research Ethics (online lecture and/or film)

Reading TBA

Wed February 18: 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 February 23: Getting there from here: how to answer a question with survey data

Wed February 25: 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>

March 2 & 4: **No class**—Spring Break

Mon March 9 &

Wed March 11: 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.

III. Roots of Individual Opinions

Mon March 16: The unconscious mind: implicit and explicit attitudes

Gonzalez, Frank J., John R. Hibbing, and Kevin B. Smith. “No Longer ‘Beyond our Scope.’” *Reader*, chapter 10.

Wed March 18: The political unconscious

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

Mon March 23: Biological bases of public opinion?!?

Reading TBA

Wed March 25: 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 30: Partisanship

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 1: The psychology of groups, applied to politics

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

Mon April 6: Emotion, take 1

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

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

Wed April 8: No lecture

Mon April 13: Emotion, take 2

Reading TBA

IV. Person, Meet Environment

Mon April 15 &

Wed April 20: 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 22: 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").

V. Conclusions: Public Opinion and American Politics

Mon April 27: 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.