

# Political Science 311

## American Political Processes: Representation and National Elections

Summer 2018

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday | Location: 3448 Mason Hall

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### Course Description

This course treats American national elections, both presidential and congressional, as institutionalized expressions of public opinion. The central purpose is to gain a better understanding of the democratic process in the US, focusing on how shifts in public opinion are translated into shifts in public policy. Among other things, we will examine whether policy change occurs because of the accountability created through elections, through the selection of entirely new representatives, or both.

### Readings

All readings for this course are available on the Canvas site, with the exception of the required textbooks. The first book, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Page and Shapiro) is available at Ulrich's, Amazon and other outlets. The second, *Democracy for Realists* (Achen and Bartels) is available as a free e-book through the library (simply search for the title of the book at lib.umich.edu. These books provide contrasting depictions of representation, the value and meaning of elections, and overall outlook toward democracy, and they will be a semi-weekly source of discussion and debate in our classroom.

All listed readings should be completed *before* coming to class on the day for which the reading is listed.

### Grades

Class Attendance and Participation.....	20%
In-Class Quizzes.....	20%
Midterm Exam.....	25%
Final Paper/Project.....	35%

Grades will be based on a midterm exam, 5 short in-class quizzes, class attendance/participation, and a final project. **Quizzes** are administered on *one*, randomly selected day of every week, leading to a total of 8 quizzes. These quizzes are designed to test whether you have read the material for that day's class. If you did the work, you should receive a 100% (or very close to it). I will select your 5 *best* scores to count toward your quiz grade. **Attendance/Participation** are assessed via two factors.

First, all students are granted one no-questions-asked absence. After that, you will need a written excuse for your absences, or face a .5% reduction in your Attendance/ Participation grade. Second, each student is expected to make an *average* of at least *one thoughtful comment or question per class period*, in order to receive full participation credit. At the midpoint of the semester, I will inform you of where you stand regarding attendance/participation. The **Midterm Exam** will be a combination of multiple choice questions and long-form essays and will occur on the first day of Week 5. It will cover all readings, lectures, and discussions from Weeks 1-4. Finally, the **Final Project** will be a 10-page research essay responding to one of 3 pre-selected prompts. Alternatively, if you'd rather not write a paper, there will be an option to do podcast-style project with another person in the class. In both cases, you will be expected to synthesize ideas from 2 or more authors and apply them to explain current events.

The project will be due on the last day of class, and students can turn their projects in by depositing them on the Canvas site. Late projects will be penalized by 1/3 letter grade for each day late. For example, an A paper would be decreased to an A-, and an A- to a B+. More detailed information on the final project will be available after the midterm.

## **Classroom Procedure and Environment**

Each week will follow a similar pattern. Day 1 will focus on foundational texts central to that week's topic. These will include readings that capture the American Founders' thoughts and intents, as well as classic political science texts that have served as the basis for modern political research. This class period will follow a traditional lecture format, but with class involvement through question and answer sessions. Days 2 and 3 will generally focus on modern empirical assessments of the week's topic, and the style of class will mirror a traditional discussion section found in a Fall/Spring term class. During each week, we first lay out how our system of representation is *supposed* to work and/or how its designers anticipated that citizens would interact with it. Then, we turn to both classic and modern empirical research on the topic, in order to assess the extent to which our system operates as designed. When the empirical literature points to potential problems, we will discuss possible solutions.

Completing the daily readings in this class is *imperative*. Not only will failure to complete the readings negatively influence your grade (both through your participation and quiz grades), but it will also worsen the classroom discussion more generally. For each topic we will discuss, experts have espoused a wide variety of differing views and beliefs over the years. We will be pitting those perspectives against one another in our discussions, and without having read the material, this style of classroom discussion simply will not work. If, however, everyone is able to read the selections carefully, we should have a quite lively and meaningful discussion. When you complete the readings, first take a look at the reflection questions listed below. Those questions will help to guide your understanding of the texts, and they will prepare you for the in-class discussions.

Please note that classroom is a space where participation of all students is welcome, protected, and expected, regardless of differences in race, sex, gender, nationality, disability, religion, ideology, or otherwise. Students will be respectful of each other both during section and while completing any assignment outside of class that requires group interaction. As noted above, I recognize that political science is a discipline in which we discuss ideologies, viewpoints, and situations about which

reasonable people may passionately disagree. Being the case, I ask that you display the utmost respect for fellow peers and their ideas during class. Please let me know if you feel the classroom lose such a level of respect at any time, so that we can address your concerns. Additionally, if you feel that your views are being disrespected in outside-the-classroom interactions related to this course, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

### **Cell Phones and Laptops**

To limit disruptions, please turn off your cell phone when you come to class. If your cell phone does ring, I will ask you to turn it off and put it away. Repeated issues with cell phones will result in decreases in your participation grade. In fairness, if my cell phone goes off during class, I will bring doughnuts from Dom's Bakery in Ypsilanti to the following session. If you are expecting an important phone call during section, please get in touch with me before class and we can arrange something. Text messaging is not permitted.

I have no problem with you using your laptop to take notes. However, if you do choose to use your computer, I ask that you please sit towards the front of the classroom and refrain from browsing Facebook / other social media, or otherwise distracting yourself with your computer. Doing so may affect your participation grade.

### **Academic Misconduct and Grade Appeals**

While the vast majority will not engage in academic misconduct, it must be reiterated that academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Please see the LSA website (<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/>) regarding this topic for more thorough explanation of the plagiarism, cheating, and general academic misconduct policies.

All grade appeals must be submitted in writing to me at least 24 hours after the grade is returned. I will review your appeal and choose to either keep the same grade or change it.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at least two weeks prior to the time when the accommodation will be needed. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; <http://www.umich.edu/sswd>) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

### **Contacting Me**

My office, office hours, and e-mail can be located at the top of the syllabus. The best way to contact me is to come to office hours (or by scheduling an appointment if necessary). Office hours are intended as a resource for you; they are a time where we can discuss questions about the material,

assignments, or your experience in class. You can also contact me through e-mail. I will respond to e-mails within 24 hours on a weekday and within 48 hours on the weekend and holidays. As you might expect, an e-mail sent during school hours will have a faster turnaround than an e-mail sent at 2 a.m. the night before an exam. If you wish to contact me this way, please include "PS311" in the subject line of the e-mail.

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## CLASS SCHEDULE

### **Unit 1: The Formation of Public Opinion**

**Week 1:** What is "Public Opinion?"

**Reflection Questions:** *When we say the "public" wants something, what do we mean? Who is the "public?" And what do we mean by "opinion?"*

Readings:

*Tuesday:*

- Wilson, F.G., 1942. The Federalist on public opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 6(4), pp.563-575.

*Wednesday:*

- Blumer, Herbert. 1948. Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling. *American Sociological Review* 13:542-554.
- Key, V. O., Jr. [1961] 1967. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf. pg. 3-18.
- Converse, Philip E. 1987. "Changing conceptions of public opinion in the political process." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 [Supplement]: 12-24.

*Thursday:*

- MacKuen, M. and Rabinowitz, G. eds., 2003. *Electoral democracy*. University of Michigan Press. Chapter 2. Available in e-book format on the library web page.
- Page and Shapiro, Chapters 1 and 2.

**Week 2:** Groups, Affiliations, and Public Opinion Formation

**Reflection Questions:** *How do citizen identities influence the development of opinion on political issues? What happens when a person's identities or affiliations conflict?*

Readings:

*Tuesday*

- Madison, James. *Federalist* No. 10.
- Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 7 (pg.285-320).

*Wednesday*

- Achen and Bartels, Chapter 8.
- Baumgartner, J.C., Francia, P.L. and Morris, J.S., 2008. A clash of civilizations? The influence of religion on public opinion of US foreign policy in the Middle East. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), pp.171-179.

*Thursday*

- Hutchings, Vincent L. 2009. "Change or More of the Same? Evaluating Racial Attitudes in the Obama Era." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73(5): 917-942.
- Brader, T., Valentino, N.A. and Suhay, E., 2008. What triggers public opposition to immigration? Anxiety, group cues, and immigration threat. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), pp.959-978.

**Week 3: Partisanship, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior**

Reflection Questions: *What are the benefits of political parties to representative democracy? What are the drawbacks? Are there any benefits or drawbacks that are particularly salient today?*

Readings

*Tuesday*

- Washington, George. *Farewell Address* (excerpt).
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren Miller and Donald Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley. Chapters 6 and 7 (pg. 120-167).

*Wednesday*

- Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Ch. 5 (pg. 84-105; don't read addendum).
- Achen and Bartels, Chapter 9.

*Thursday*

- Carsey, Thomas M., and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 464-477.
- Iyengar, S., Sood, G. and Lelkes, Y., 2012. Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization. *Public opinion quarterly*, 76(3), pp.405-431.

**Week 4: Elites and Public Opinion**

Reflection Questions: *Who are "elites," and under what circumstances may elites influence public opinion? Does this influence undermine democracy in any way? How might it complicate representation?*

Readings:

*Tuesday:*

- Madison, *Federalist* No. 63
- Page, and Shapiro, Chapter 8, pp. 339-354.

*Wednesday:*

- Converse, Philip E. 1990. "Popular Representation and the Distribution of Information." In J. Ferejohn and J. Kuklinski (Eds.), *Information and Democratic Processes*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois. Pp. 369-388.
- Achen and Bartels, Chapter 3.

*Thursday:*

- Nyhan, B. and Reifler, J., 2010. When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), pp.303-330.

## **Unit 2. Elections as Instruments of Representation of Public Opinion**

**Week 5:** Voting and Participation in Congressional Elections

Reflection Questions: *Who votes in congressional elections? Why does this matter, and how does it relate to the reflection of public opinion in public policy?*

Readings:

*Tuesday*

- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance Of Social Capital In America." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28:664-683.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2004 (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. Chapter 5 (pg. 113-150).

*Wednesday*

- **MIDTERM EXAM**

*Thursday*

- Achen and Bartels, Chapter 4.
- Healy, A. and Malhotra, N., 2013. Retrospective voting reconsidered. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, pp.285-306.

**Week 6:** Elections as Mechanisms for Dyadic Representation: Accountability, Competence, and Descriptive Representation

Reflection questions: *To what extent are elections able to constrain the behavior of elected officials? What is required in order for this kind of constraint to occur? What is the mechanism underlying this constraint?*

Readings:

*Tuesday*

- Miller, Warren E., and Donald E. Stokes. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57, no. 1 (1963): 45-56.
- Alt, J., Bueno de Mesquita, E. and Rose, S., 2011. Disentangling accountability and competence in elections: evidence from US term limits. *The Journal of Politics*,

73(1), pp.171-186.

*Wednesday*

- Canes-Wrone, B., Brady, D.W. and Cogan, J.F., 2002. Out of step, out of office: Electoral accountability and House members' voting. *American Political Science Review*, 96(1), pp.127-140.
- Bafumi, J. and Herron, M.C., 2010. Leapfrog representation and extremism: A study of American voters and their members in Congress. *American Political Science Review*, 104(3), pp.519-542.

*Thursday*

- Fenno, R.F., 1977. US House members in their constituencies: An exploration. *American Political Science Review*, 71(3), pp.883-917.
- Harden, J.J., 2013. Multidimensional responsiveness: the determinants of legislators' representational priorities. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 38(2), pp.155-184.
- Grimmer, J., 2013. Appropriators not position takers: The distorting effects of electoral incentives on congressional representation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), pp.624-642.

**Week 7: Elections as Mechanisms for Representation: Descriptive and Collective Representation**

Reflection questions: *Should direct policy responsiveness be the aim of elections? Absent direct policy responsiveness, how else might elections translate public opinion into policy? When aggregated, how well does our system represent the views of the populace?*

Readings:

*Tuesday*

- Gay, C., 2002. Spirals of trust? The effect of descriptive representation on the relationship between citizens and their government. *American Journal of Political Science*, pp.717-732.
- Swers, M.L., 1998. Are women more likely to vote for women's issue bills than their male colleagues?. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, pp.435-448.

*Wednesday*

- Weissberg, Robert. 1978. "Collective vs. Dyadic Representation in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 72(2): 535-47.
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 10 (pg. 383-398).

*Thursday*

- Lax, J.R. and Phillips, J.H., 2012. The democratic deficit in the states. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(1), pp.148-166.
- Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581
- Erikson, R.S., 2015. Income inequality and policy responsiveness. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18, pp.11-29.