American Politics: Behavior

This course provides an introduction to some of the major themes in political behavior including partisanship and elections, political attitudes and ideology, and the role of the mass media in shaping the public’s political beliefs and orientations. This course is also designed to help prepare graduate students in political science to pass the political behavior component of comprehensive examination in the field of American Politics.

Course Requirements:

(1) Prepare for every class by reading and digesting the assigned material. Recommended readings will not be discussed in-depth in class but you will want to read them at some point for exams.

(2) Actively participate in class discussions. Students should prepare to address the following questions: What are the major questions motivating this research? What are the key theories? Are the methodological strategies and data appropriate? What might provide a better test? In addition, each student will be assigned the task of introducing and briefly critiquing one of the readings each class. In their overview, students should highlight the question, research design, evidence, results, and implications of their reading as well as note any major flaws.

(3) For the writing part of the course you have two options.

Option A: Write three 5 page papers critically reviewing the literature in some specific topic of political behavior. Each paper should consist of:

A. A description of the work that has been published on your topic of choice. This section should be organized to illuminate the differing perspectives in the literature, and (possibly) show how those perspectives have emerged over time.

B. A critical evaluation of the strengths and weakness of the differing perspectives. This section should also address the extent to which the different perspectives are complementary to or in conflict with each other.

C. An evaluation of what sort of future research would be most important to further our understanding of the specific topic you chose.

These three papers are due Jan 22nd, Feb 19th, and March 12th.

Option B: Write a research paper on some aspect of American political behavior. The paper should be a quality product that could ultimately be publishable – although you do not have to complete all parts of the project for this class. The paper should be different from papers you have written for other classes or should show substantial progress from previous work. Please see me to discuss different projects and the exact requirements for the paper.

Books you should think about purchasing:

I. **Values- What are the basic values of the American public? Are we exceptional?**

Discussion Questions: 1) What is the American Ethos? 2) Why does America have that Ethos? 3) Is America really different?

Alexis de Toqueville. *Democracy in America*, Part I, Sections 1 (Origin of the Anglo Americans) 2 (Democratic Social Condition), and 3 (The Sovereignty of the People).


**Recommended:**

Declaration of Independence

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/print_friendly.html?page=declaration_transcript_content.html&title=NARA%20|%20The%20Declaration%20of%20Independence%3A%20Transcription


Herbert McCloskey and Ada Brill, *Dimensions of Tolerance* (1983), chs. 3,6


II. **Ideology- How well organized or sophisticated is our thinking about politics?**

Discussion Question: How well organized or sophisticated is our thinking about politics?

Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes. *The American Voter* (1960), Ch 10


Marcus and MacKuen. “Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and Involvement during Presidential Campaigns” APSR 87(1993): 672-685

**Recommended:**


Ted Brader *Campaigning for hearts and minds: how emotional appeals in political ads work* (2006)
III. Information – Do we have enough information to make reasoned political decisions?

Discussion Question: Do the public have enough information to make reasoned political decisions?

Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes. *The American Voter* (1960), Ch. 8


Recommended:


IV. Influences – What are the factors that drives public opinion and how do they distort our views?

Discussion Questions: What are the factors that drives public opinion? When is the public more susceptible? What constrains influence?


Recommended:
Peter K. Hatemi et al. 2010. AJPS_Not by Twins Alone_Using the Extended Family Design to Investigate Genetic Influence on Political Beliefs, 798–814
Andrew Gelman and Gary King “Why are American Presidential Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes are so Predictable?” BIPS 23 (1993): 409-451

V. Party Identification – What is it?
Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes. The American Voter (1960) Ch 7
Recommended:
Morris Fiorina, Retrospective Voting in American National Elections (1981), chs. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9
Hajnal, Zoltan, and Taeku Lee. Race, Immigration, and (Non)Partisanship. 2011. Selected Chapters

VI. Vote Choice- What factors govern vote choice?
IN ADDITION TO THE READINGS THIS WEEK, YOU WILL HAVE TO EMPIRICALLY ASSESS THE ROLE OF RACE IN THE VOTE USING CCES DATA THAT I WILL PROVIDE FOR YOU – MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW
Discussion Questions: 1) What factors govern vote choice? 2) How do we empirically model vote choice?
Recommended:
V.O. Key, Jr., The Responsible Electorate (1966), chs. 1-3.
Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and McPhee, Voting (1954), chs. 1, 4-7, 11,13
Morris Fiorina. Retrospective Voting in American National Elections (1981), chs. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9
VII. Dealignment/Realignment/Polarization – Explaining major partisan changes

Discussion Questions: 1) Theories of party change? 2) Is America realigning? 3) Is America polarizing?


Recommended:


Nie, Verba, and Petrocik. The Changing American Voter (1976) Chs. 4, 6, 10


VIII. Participation- Why do we vote in the first place? Who votes? When do we vote?

Discussion Questions: 1) Why do we vote in the first place? 2) Who votes? 3) When do we vote?


Sidney Verba and Norman Nie. Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality (1972) Chs. 2-6, 8-10


Recommended:

Robert Jackman 2014. Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in Industrial Democracies. APSR

S. Rosenstone and M. Hansen. Mobilization, Participation, and American Democracy (1993). Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7


Zoltan Hajnal. *America’s Uneven Democracy: Turnout, Race, and Representation in City Politics* (2009)

Kevin Arceneaux and David Nickerson “Who is Mobilized to Vote? A Re-Analysis of 11 Field Experiments” *AJPS* (2009)


Kevin Arceneaux and David Nickerson. 2009. Who is Mobilized to Vote? A Re-Analysis of 11 Field Experiments. *AJPS* 53(1)”1-16

**IX. Race - What role does race play in American politics?**


**Recommended:**


V.O. Key. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949)


X. Public Opinion, Participation, and Democratic Outcomes- What are the consequences of our political views and our actions?
Discussion Question: Who or what controls democratic outcomes?

Recommended:
Gilens, Martin. 2012. Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America
STUFF YOU SHOULD KNOW BUT WON'T LEARN HERE

Voting Behavior in Congressional Elections

Interest Groups
Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (1965), chs 1, 2, 5, 6
Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (1966), chs. 5, 8, 9, 10.
Theodore Lowi, The End of Liberalism, 2nd ed (1979), chs. 3, 5, 8, 10
James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (1973), chs. 1-6, 9.
Kay L. Schlozman and John Tierney, Organized Interests and American Democracy (1986)
Bauer, Pool and Dexter, American Business and Public Policy (1963)
Robert Salisbury, Interests and Institutions (1992), Chs. 1-4
Dara Z. Strolovitch, Affirmative Advocacy (2007), Chapters 1, 2, 4