

POLS Y317: Voting, Elections, and Public Opinion

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Spring 2022

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Course Description

This course introduces focuses on voting, elections, and public opinion in the United States. We will cover the determinants of voting behavior in elections, and the ways in which elections are conducted in the U.S. We will also discuss the nature of public opinion — where it comes from, its stability, its evolution — using examples from both domestic and foreign policy. We will also cover the development of political ideology and partisan identification. This course will also focus on the similarities and differences between presidential and congressional campaigns, as well as the similarities and differences between primary elections and general elections.

Course Objectives

1. Understand the nature of partisanship and ideology in the United States.
2. Learn about public opinion — where it comes from, how it constrains (or does not constrain) elected officials, etc.
3. Understand the nature of political campaigns and how voters behave during election season.

Required Books

There are no required books for this course. All required readings will be posted on Canvas.

Course Policy

The details of the course are outlined below.

Grading Policy

- 25% of your grade will be determined by the first examination. This exam will cover all of the material that was covered prior to the date of the exam.
- 25% of your grade will be determined by the second examination. This exam will cover all of the material that was covered prior to the date of the exam but *not* the material tested on the first exam.

- 25% of your grade will be determined by the third examination. This exam will cover all of the material that was covered prior to the date of the exam but *not* the material tested on the second or first exams. In other words, none of the exams are cumulative. Nevertheless, because many of the concepts in this course build on one another, knowledge of the material covered earlier in the semester will be essential for successfully completing the exams.
- 25% of your grade will be determined by a series of short quizzes administered via Canvas. Note that these quizzes *must* be taken by the assigned due date. Late quizzes will *not* be accepted. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped at the end of the semester.

Make-up Policy

Unless you have communicated with me *before* the day of the exam, I do not allow make-up exams. If you miss the exam without communicating with me beforehand, you will receive a zero on the exam.

Extra Credit Policy

Extra credit is not offered in this course.

Attendance Policy

Attending class is tremendously important. Learning takes place through engagement with the material and with your peers. Therefore, I expect you to attend every class session. If you know that you will not be able to attend class for some particular week, please email me a week in advance to let me know that you will not be in attendance. Excused absences include religious observances or other university-sanctioned absences. If you are sick or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, *please do not worry about your attendance*. Focus instead on getting healthy.

Health and Safety

IU is following recommended public health guidance in response to the pandemic. In recognition of all IU community members owe to each other, we expect every member of the IU community to adhere to all current policies and practices. For current information on that guidance, see <https://covid.iu.edu>. I will make every effort to resolve concerns informally but, if I cannot, I will follow usual procedures outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, including submitting a written report to the Dean of Students.

As your instructor, my first obligation is to ensure the immediate safety of the classroom. Students who engage in uncomfortable or threatening behaviors, including an unwillingness to follow campus policies regarding masking, will be asked to leave the classroom that day for their own safety and the safety of those around them.

All members of the IU community including students may report student conduct and wellness concerns to the Division of Student Affairs using an online form located at <https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/get-help/index.html>.

The Honor Code and Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offense. If you are using someone's words without proper citation, you are guilty of plagiarism. See the IU [policy handbook](#) for a more thorough definition. Any work that is suspected of containing plagiarism will receive a zero and will be reported to the appropriate University committee. If you are in doubt, cite your sources!

Students with Disabilities

If any student requires assistance or accommodations for a disability, please get in touch with me at your earliest convenience. You can reach me via email or by attending office hours. You must have established your eligibility for disability support services through the Office of Disability Services for Students in Wells Library, W302, 812-855-7578.

Class Schedule

Students must read the following before the class meeting to which they are assigned. The readings will be available on the course Canvas website. Note that these readings are subject to change. Any adjustments will be communicated in advance.

Throughout the course, we will be discussing three distinct — yet, interrelated — topics: partisanship, parties, and ideology; participation, voter choice, and electoral campaigns; and, finally, the nature and origin of public opinion. The syllabus is loosely organized in that order.

1. Parties, Partisanship, and Ideology

Introduction & The American Electoral Process

1/10: Course Overview

1/12: The American Electoral Process

Our Party System

1/19: What's a Party? Plus, American Society and Political Culture

1/24: Party-in-Government, Party-in-Electorate, and Party Organizations

- Azari, Julia. 2016. "Weak parties and strong partisanship are a bad combination." *Vox*.

Political Parties & Interest Groups

1/26: The American Two-Party System

- Benoit, Kenneth. 2006. "Duverger's Law and the Study of Electoral Systems." *French Politics* 4: 69-83.

1/31: Interest Groups

- Palmer, Annie. 2021. "Amazon launches website to go on the offensive against Congress' antitrust tech bills." *CNBC.com*.
- Abramson, Alana. 2021. "How a Coalition of Business and Labor Groups Helped Save the Infrastructure Bill." *Time*.

Partisanship and Ideology

2/2: Origins of Partisanship

2/7: Negative Partisanship

- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven W. Webster. 2017. "Negative Partisanship Explains Everything." *Politico*.

Ideology and Polarization

2/9: Ideology in the Mass Public

- Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter.

2/14: Polarization

- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2): 542-555.
- Fiorina, Morris P, and Abrams, Samuel A., and Jeremy C. Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2): 556-560.

2/16: Exam #1

2. Participation, Voter Choice, and Electoral Campaigns

Participation & Choice

2/21: Who Participates?

- Verba, Sidney, and Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and Brady, Henry, and Norman H. Nie. 1993. "Citizen Activity: Who Participates? What Do They Say?" *American Political Science Review* 87 (2): 303-318.

2/23: Voter Choice

- Bartels, Larry M. 2000. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (1): 35-50.

Presidential & Congressional Elections

2/28: Presidential Primaries

- Yglesias, Matthew. "The US presidential primary process, explained." *Vox*.

3/2: The General Election

3/7: Running for Congress

- Fowler, Linda L. 1996. "Who Runs for Congress?" *Political Science & Politics* 29 (3): 430-434.
- Goldmacher, Shane. 2013. "Why Would Anyone Ever Want to Run for Congress?" *The Atlantic*.

3/9: Exam #2

3. The Nature and Origin of Public Opinion

Public Opinion Fundamentals

3/21: Opinion Formation in the Mass Public

3/23: The Link Between Public Opinion and Governing

Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories

3/28: Misinformation in American Politics

- Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions." *Political Behavior* 23: 303-330.

3/30: Belief in Conspiracy Theories

- Miller, Joanne M., and Saunders, Kyle L., and Christina E. Farhart. 2016. "Conspiracy Endorsement as Motivated Reasoning: The Moderating Roles of Political Knowledge and Trust." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (4): 824-844.

The Media

4/4: Cable TV, Talk Radio, and American Politics

- "Rush Limbaugh galvanised and embodied the modern American right." *The Economist*.

4/6: The Air Wars: Campaigns and TV Advertisements

- Gerber, Alan S., and Gimpel, James G., and Green, Donald P., and Daron R. Shaw. 2011. "How Large and Long-lasting Are the Persuasive Effects of Campaign Ads? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 105 (1): 135-150.

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

4/11: Race, Ethnicity, and Public Opinion

4/13: Gender and Public Opinion

- Kaufmann, Karen M., and John R. Petrocik. 1999. "The Changing Politics of American Men: Understanding the Sources of the Gender Gap." *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (3): 864-887.

New Frontiers in Public Opinion

4/18: Social Influence

- Klar, Samara. 2014. "Partisanship in a Social Setting." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (3): 687-704.

4/20: Genetics, Personality, and Emotions

Conclusions

4/25: Thoughts on American Democracy

4/27: Review for Exam / Reading Day

5/2 (10:20 AM): Exam #3