This graduate seminar provides a scholarly examination of mass political behavior in the United States, with an emphasis on political participation, elections, and voting behavior. The goal is to survey what the best and most visible scholarship in the field has to say about why the American electorate behaves as it does. The purpose is to provide a foundation for students to conduct original research on mass political behavior. To define our inquiry, the syllabus mostly excludes students that are focused squarely on public opinion, political communication, political parties, and political psychology because those topics are addressed in other courses. The readings emphasize topics that are of interest to researchers today, so the material, drawn from both books and journal articles, tends to be contemporary rather than classic. The course is designed for Ph.D. students in political science and draws mainly on the scholarly literature, so other students should confirm that the course will be useful to them.

Responsibilities

I expect that students will do all of the required reading and come to class prepared to discuss it in a thoughtful fashion. Required readings are posted on the course web site; recommended readings are provided for students who wish to explore topics further. The number of pages required each week is kept at manageable level for this reason. Careful reading and participation in class discussion are the keys to making the class productive for everyone involved.

You might not immediately understand everything in the readings. In particular, the methodologies and other technical material deployed in the readings will be difficult to grasp if you have not yet taken courses in research design and advanced statistics. That is fine. I ask that you give it a serious try and then bring your insights as well as your questions to class.

One half of the course grade is based on reaction papers and class participation. The other half of the grade is based on the final paper.

Each student will write four critical reaction papers during the semester for class meetings of your choosing. You do not need to inform me in advance of the weeks you will be writing. For each of the four weeks that you select, papers should be uploaded to the course web site on Canvas by 5pm on Monday. The papers should offer a thoughtful response to the readings and may highlight their underappreciated contributions, oversights, alternative interpretations, and unanswered questions. They should touch on all of the week’s readings on their terms, but may identify one theme,
shortcoming, or question to address as a way to connect them. Detached discussions and essays that are mostly personal opinion are not as helpful as meatier analyses that wrestle with the arguments and evidence in the readings. Each paper should be no longer than three double-spaced pages. You should be prepared to discuss the materials covered in each class, whether or not you wrote a reaction paper for that session.

Each student will write a longer paper to be submitted at the end the semester. The paper should take one of two forms. One form is a focused literature review and research design of 15-20 pages. The other form is an original empirical paper that actually reports research and will run longer than 20 pages. In most cases these papers will rely on secondary data such as the ANES, CCES, aggregate election results, or replication datasets. Replicating and extending an existing study using publicly available data is acceptable and can be a valuable way to learn about the research process and stimulate new ideas. Be aware of the IRB requirements that will require you to start earlier if you decide to collect original data. If you are a Ph.D. student in Political Science in at least the second year of the program, I strongly recommend writing an original research paper. With my permission you may co-author the research paper (but not the literature review and research design) with a fellow student.

Be thinking about the paper from the beginning of the semester. You might want to read ahead on the syllabus if you intend to write on a topic that is addressed later in the semester. Please feel free to be in touch with me to get feedback your ideas and advice on related readings and useful resources. In most cases we should discuss your paper idea in person or by email in the first half of the semester. A prospectus for the paper of about two pages double-spaced should be uploaded to the course web site by Friday, April 10. The final paper is due in hard copy by Friday, May 8 (pending an agreement between the Registrar and the College on grading deadlines).

Readings

Most of the course readings are from journal articles. They will be posted on the course web site. Two books are required:


The books are on reserve at the library but should be purchased if possible. You might also decide to purchase other books even if the assigned chapters are posted online. Please brings required readings to class meetings as we will be referring to them during our discussion.

Other Considerations

Your success in this class is important to me. All students are strongly encouraged to visit office hours if only to introduce yourself and let me know how the course is working for you.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact me early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

If you must miss class due to illness or another valid conflict, please contact me in advance.
I reserve the right to modify the syllabus timeline or specific readings as needed.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. I will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the appropriate dean’s office.

Please only use electronic devices in class for referencing course materials, taking notes, and occasionally tracking down online items that are necessary for our discussions. Everything else should be quieted and stowed away for later use.

January 21: Introduction

January 28: Voting as a Unique Form of Participation

Required
1. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady. *Voice and Equality*. (chapters 2, 3, 7-14, & 16)

Recommended

February 4: Voter Turnout

Required
**Recommended**

**February 11: Emotion in Political Participation**

**Required**

**Recommended**

**February 18: The Basic Vote Choice**

**Required**
1. Achen and Bartels. *Democracy for Realists*. (chapter 2)
Recommended

February 25: Party Identification

Required

Recommended

March 3: Partisan Polarization

Required

Recommended
March 10: Interests and Choices

Required

Recommended

March 17: No class due to Spring Recess

March 24: Economic Voting

Required
1. Achen and Bartels. *Democracy for Realists*. (chapters 3-7)

Recommended
March 31: Political Information

**Required**

**Recommended**

April 7: Social Networks

**Required**

**Recommended**

April 10: Prospectus Due
April 14: Campaign Effects

Required

Recommended

April 21: Media Influence

Required

Recommended


**April 28: Congressional Elections**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 8: Paper Due (tentative date)**