

POLITICAL SCIENCE 201: INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
SUMMER 2006

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WHEN: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30-7:18
WHERE: Denney Hall (DE), 0245
OFFICE HRS.: Wed. 2-4 p.m. (and by appt.)

COURSE OVERVIEW

There's the country of America, which you have to defend, but
there's also the idea of America. America is more than just a
country, it's an idea – an idea that's supposed to be contagious.
— Bono on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* (2002)

As many pundits, politicians, and professors¹ have noted – including Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French political thinker who wrote about the United States of the 1830s – America is an experiment in equality, for full democratic participation is a recent political invention (historically speaking, that is). Tocqueville saw something special in the young United States, and speculated on why democracy was thriving in this country. Over 175 years later, and in a very different country (and world), the “big” question remains as important as ever: What has allowed American democracy to survive and thrive? Understanding how over 300 million people of diverse backgrounds and interests combine to “make things work” necessitates examining the political behavior of everyday citizens. Why do people make certain electoral decisions? What explains the political attitudes and involvements of the mass public? Why do people vote? In this course we will consider these and other topics as we attempt to answer Tocqueville’s “big” question.

Political behavior is a term that subsumes several broad topics, including public opinion and political participation. Because each of these areas could easily be (and in fact is!) a course of its own, the goal of this class is necessarily limited to providing you with an introduction to these topics (and more specifically, these topics as they pertain to the United States). We will begin by looking at public opinion, examining its measurement, how individuals’ opinions are formed (at both the individual and mass levels), and the nature of the relationship between public opinion and government (this will take us into the perennial question(s) about what structures the electoral choices of individuals, including the role of the media in voting behavior). The topic of political participation will be investigated from an equally broad perspective, which means not only looking at why people vote (from a number of theoretical perspectives), but why they do (or do not) engage in other political activities (e.g., putting up yard signs, donating money to causes, attending rallies, etc.).

REQUIRED TEXTS

1) Erikson, Robert and Kent Tedin. *American Public Opinion*, 7th ed. Pearson-Longman

¹ My thanks go to Dr. Paul Djupe (Denison University) who first introduced me to Tocqueville, and whose political behavior course informs this introduction and syllabus; thanks also go to Dr. Larry Baum (Ohio State University) for passing along years of course-planning wisdom.

2) Conway, M. Margaret. *Political Participation in the United States*, 3rd. ed. CQ Press.

(These texts are available at the OSU Barnes & Noble.)

Any additional readings will either be placed on electronic reserve or will be available on the internet (through the library's electronic resources). The location of the readings will be marked on the class schedule (or will be announced and/or emailed if the schedule and readings should change). Please note that the course reading and lecture schedule is *not* set in stone, as I may add/drop/re-arrange the material based upon the pace and performance of the class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance/Participation	20%
Weekly Reaction Papers (8 x 5% each)	40%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%

Attendance/Participation: Part of this course will be interactive lecture – meaning that I will ask you questions as we move through the material – and part of it will be discussion based. Thus, it is crucial that you attend class regularly and make a special effort to be well-prepared, having read and thought about the readings in advance.

To encourage you to take coming to class seriously, I will be employing a “cold calling system” this summer. That is, before each session I will “randomly” select about half of the class roster, and during the course of that evening’s lecture, discussions, or activities I will call upon those selected. If I call on you and you are absent, or if you are *clearly* unprepared for class (i.e., it is obvious that you have never cracked the book/have not been paying any attention), I will make a note of it. Everyone in the class gets two “freebies” – meaning that you can be unprepared to participate/have two *unexcused* absences (see below for further details) – but after that you lose 2% of your final attendance/participation grade for each mark against you.

If you do not already do so, I encourage you to take notes when you read (as this will likely pay off both in class and on exams). Please see me if you would like further suggestions and/or study tips.

A Note on Participation: Please be respectful of others (and their opinions) when participating in class discussions. Rude or inappropriate comments will not be tolerated.

Attendance Policy: To be fair to everyone, in order for an absence to be excused I require prior notification via email (if at all possible) and documentation upon your return to campus (if applicable). That being said, I am a reasonable person and certainly understand that family/personal emergencies are rarely anticipated. If you need to miss class – and are not using one of your unexcused absences – please inform me of your circumstances as soon as possible. (Please contact me if you have questions about what constitutes an excused absence.)

Weekly Reaction Papers: While attending class is important, being prepared to learn and participate is equally important; this means thinking carefully and critically about the reading, and coming to class with questions and/or comments (at least in my estimation). Thus, in addition to occasionally calling on people to keep the class involved, I am also assigning weekly reaction papers.

For each week of class (excluding week 1), I want you to pick one day of material (whether for the Tuesday or Thursday meeting) and write a one-page reaction paper that: 1) summarizes the material for that day in your own words and 2) “asks” several questions about the material (see “course policies” section for due date information). The breakdown of the one-page paper should be about one-half summary/synthesis and one-half questions/comments. Alternatively, you may (and are even encouraged) to write a reaction paper that 1) summarizes the course material and 2) connects it to any current political events being discussed in the media (with a similar 50/50 breakdown).

Papers are to be **no more** than one-page, 12 point font, double-spaced, and all references to course and other materials should be properly cited (an attached reference sheet will not count as going over 1 page). Please see or contact me *before* you turn in an assignment if you are unsure about how/when to cite something. Each paper will be graded based on substance, organization, and writing style (i.e., I will grade down for multiple spelling and grammatical errors). Substantively, I will be looking for evidence that you have truly engaged the material. Your questions and comments need not be profound, but they should be thoughtful, well-articulated, and well-supported. Do not summarize the reading and then spend half a page making unsupported statements such as “I liked this” and “I didn’t like that.” In other words, explain your comments, opinions, and questions.

Note: The one page limit is an important part of this assignment, as a skill that is highly valued (beyond this class) is the ability to write clearly, cogently, and *concisely*.

Exams: The midterm and the final exams will both be comprised of short answer/essay questions, as well as multiple choice/short answer questions on key terms and concepts. Material for each test will come from class lectures, discussions, and readings. *The final exam will not be cumulative.*

COURSE POLICIES

Weekly Papers: Weekly papers are due by **4:30 p.m.** – in my email account – on the day of class for which they are to be written. That is, if you choose to write on Tuesday’s material, the paper must be emailed to me by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday. If I do not have the paper before class, I will accept it at my discretion (and may take off a letter grade). Under no circumstances will I take a paper that is more than a day late. There will be no make-ups if you miss both of the paper opportunities for a given week. (Obviously, I will be flexible on this in the event of extenuating circumstances (please see below).)

Submission of Papers: I expect you to email all response papers as electronic copies (attached as *Microsoft Word* documents). I will email you back to confirm that I have received your paper.

(Please note: I am quite familiar with the “I forgot the attachment” line!) *Always be sure to reference “PS 201” in the title of your email and attachment (otherwise I may think your assignment is spam).*

Grading Policy: Papers

A (9-10): An ‘A’ paper thoroughly covers the assigned readings. It presents a clear summary/synthesis, as well as appropriate evidence from class readings or other sources to support any opinions/comments/questions/arguments. Additionally, it is well-written, organized, and has proper documentation of sources.

B (8-8.9): A ‘B’ paper is like a “sloppier” version of an A paper. For example, though it may get the general ideas right, the paper may need a bit of work in terms of organization. Likewise, poor writing in an otherwise solid effort may make for a B paper.

C(7-7.9): A ‘C’ paper combines several serious problems, including disorganization and unsupported statements, a poor summary/synthesis, and poor writing.

D(6-6.9): A ‘D’ paper will have fundamental problems involving organization, the summary/synthesis of material, the use of evidence to support opinions/arguments, and writing.

F(below 6): An ‘F’ paper is an extreme ‘D’ paper. Very poor writing (extensive spelling and grammatical mistakes), combined with a very poor summary/synthesis and minimal/no use of evidence to support comments/questions will result in a failing grade.

Grading Policy: Final Grades

Final grades will be based on the following:

A	94% and above	D+	67-69%
A-	90-93%	D	60-66%
B+	87-89%	E	59% and below
B	84-86%		
B-	80-83%		
C+	77-79%		
C	74-76%		
C-	70-73%		

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities *may* arise during the quarter. Stay tuned for details.

Excuses: I am a reasonable person, and will accept *legitimate* excuses for late work, the missing of class, and the missing of in-class exams (note: I basically consider “legitimate” to be limited to family/personal emergencies and serious illnesses, though ask me if you questions about specific circumstances). To be fair to everyone, I require prior notification (if at all possible) via email for missed deadlines and absences (see attendance policy below), and documentation upon your return to campus.

Academic Honesty: Cheating on assignments (whether on papers or in-class exercises) will not be tolerated, and can seriously damage (and even end) your college career. Please see the

university's website (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp) for a full description of what Ohio State considers to be dishonest behavior. Any suspected instances of cheating will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct. I expect all papers to follow proper citation and stylistic guidelines.

Tape-Recording of the Class: *Permission is required for the tape-recording of lectures.* That being said, I prefer that you *not* tape-record my class, though there may be special circumstances in which I will allow it. If you are having trouble taking notes on/keeping up with class discussions and lectures, please speak with me as I may be able to help.

Disability: I am more than happy to make special arrangements for students with disabilities that have been documented through the Office of Disability Services (<http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>). If you have a documented disability, please contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make any necessary arrangements for you.

COURSE PLAN AND ASSIGNED READINGS

PART I: PUBLIC OPINION

Week 1: What are we doing here? (and Some Big Picture Concerns)

▪Tuesday, **June 20:** Introductions; the syllabus

▪Thursday, **June 22**

- 1) What is political behavior?
- 2) Political Culture and American democracy; Public Opinion in democratic Societies
- 3) The Measurement of Public Opinion

Reading: Erikson and Tedin (EK): Chapter 1, 2

Recommended reading:

Fiorina, Morris. 2002. "Parties, Participation, and Representation in America: Old Theories Face New Realities." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*. Katznelson and Miller, eds.

Week 2: Public Opinion: From the Micro to the Macro

▪Tuesday, **June 27:** Public Opinion and the Individual Citizen

- 1) What do people know?
- 2) How do ideology and partisanship structure political opinions?

Reading: EK: Chapter 3

Recommended reading:

Delli-Carpini and Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*.

▪Thursday, **June 29:** Macro-level Public Opinion

- 1) What do polls tell us about the content of public opinion?

Reading: EK: Chapter 4

Week 3: Socialization and Groups

▪Tuesday, **July 4: No Class!**

America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens.

–George W. Bush

▪Thursday, **July 6:**

- 1) How do we learn about politics? What do we get from our parents? What do we get from simply being ourselves?

Reading: EK: Chapter 5, 7

Week 4: The Media and Voting Behavior

▪Tuesday, **July 11:** The Media and Public Opinion

- 1) What are we to make of today's media?
- 2) Bias? What kinds of bias? Negativity?
- 3) What do we know (or think we know) about media effects?

Reading: EK: Chapter 8

▪Thursday, **July 13:** Elections and Public Opinion

- 1) What influences citizens' voting decisions?
- 2) Models of Voting Behavior

Reading: EK: Chapter 9

Week 5: Bringing it back to democracy

▪Tuesday, **July 18:** What's the proper role of the public?

- 1) Do people support democratic values? What are democratic values?

Reading: EK: Chapter 6,11

- 2) Review for midterm exam

▪Thursday, **July 20:** Midterm Examination (In-class)

PART II: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Half of the American people have never read a newspaper. Half never voted for President. One hopes it is the same half. –Gore Vidal

Week 6: From Public Opinion to Political Participation

▪Tuesday, **July 25:**

- 1) go over midterm
- 2) course feedback
- 3) What is political participation, and what are some historical trends in political participation?

Reading: Conway: Preface and Chapter 1

▪Thursday, **July 27:** Demographics!

- 1) How do certain social characteristics help to explain patterns in political participation?

Reading: Conway: Chapter 2

Week 7: The Ins and Outs of Participation

▪Tuesday, **August 1:** What are you thinking? The psychology of participation

Reading: Conway: Chapter 3

▪Thursday, **August 3:** The Political Environment

- 1) Realignment
- 2) What are political movements?
- 3) The Mass Media and political participation

Reading: Conway: Chapter 4

Week 8: The Social and Legal Contexts of Participation

▪Tuesday, **August 8:** What role do organizations and social networks play in political participation?

Reading: 1) Huckfeldt and Sprague, “Citizens, Contexts, and Politics.” In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*. 1993.
2) Verba et al. *Voice and Equality* 1995. Chapters TBD
(Both of these readings will be placed on e-reserve)

▪Thursday, **August 10:** The Legal Structure of Political Participation

Reading: 1) Conway: Chapter 5
2) Powell, “American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective.” (JSTOR)

Week 9: Rationality and Wrapping Up

▪Tuesday, **August 15:** The rationality of voting

- 1) collective action

Reading: Conway: Chapter 6

▪Thursday, **August 17:** Comparing Explanations of Participation

- 1) Does political participation have instrumental effects, or is it purely symbolic?
- 2) Social Capital (revisited)
- 3) Review for final and course wrap up

Reading: Conway: Chapter 7, 8

Week 10: The Final

▪Tuesday, **August 22:** Final Examination (In-Class)

There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by
what is right with America. –Bill Clinton