PLAP 7110
Core Seminar in Political Behavior
Fall 2013

Thursdays 1:00 – 3:30pm
New Cabell Hall 209

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office hours: to be announced
and by appointment

This course provides an introduction to the vast literature devoted to public opinion and mass political behavior, and is designed to help prepare you for the political behavior component of the American politics comprehensive examination. We will survey the major theoretical approaches and empirical research on the behavior of non-elite political actors. “Behavior” is a broad term, which includes the psychological and attitudinal precursors as well as overt behavior such as voting or political protest. The primary focus will be on American public opinion and behavior, although there will be some attention to comparative work. In addition to empirical research on the antecedents of opinion and its role in the larger political system, we will consider normative work on the meaning and measurement of political behavior and on its role in democratic politics. Throughout we will give careful attention to questions of methodology and research design.

Course Requirements

This course is a seminar, so it is vital that you come to class having read—and, critically, thought about—the week’s readings, and that you participate in the discussion.

Each week you will be required to write a short essay—of no more than one page—responding to the week’s readings. These essays should try to engage a number of the week’s readings by doing one or more of the following: juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations or approaches to a substantive topic; criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research; criticizing the conceptualization and/or measurement of a particular construct; analyzing the implications of a set of findings; suggesting new questions or hypotheses for research; developing similarities and contrasts with arguments or research found in the readings from previous weeks. More generally, these papers should contain an argument, not a summary or description of the readings. These papers should be turned in to me by email no later than 11pm on Wednesday before the scheduled Thursday meeting. I will comment (briefly) on them and turn them back at the end of each seminar session. These essays will serve as the starting point for our discussion.

Additionally, each week at least one student will make a presentation about a research question based on – but drawing on material beyond – that week’s readings (more on this in class).
You have two choices for written work in this course:

Choice A: Write three 5–7 page papers critically reviewing the literature in some specific topic of political behavior—a topic from the syllabus or a (pre-approved) alternative. 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. This description may begin with the syllabus, but should go notably beyond it.

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 October 10, November 7, and December 5.

Option B: Complete a research paper on some aspect of American political behavior, and it must be approved in advance. You will be asked to consider and identify a potential topic early in the semester. The assumption is that this project will serve some concrete purpose beyond the course; for example, as part of a dissertation prospectus or chapter, a master’s thesis, a conference paper, or an article for submission to a journal.

Finally, each student will present his or her own work during a symposium on the last day of class. If you complete Option A, you will present one of your three literature reviews; if you complete Option B you will present that work.

Your grade will be based on weekly participation (reaction papers, in-class presentations, and discussion), final presentation (25%), and written work (50%).
Readings

Most readings are available through JSTOR and/or other UVa electronic resources; I have included links in the syllabus. Book chapters will be posted to Collab.

The following are required books. We will read all or a good bit of these books; they are also among the most centrally important in the field.


Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan. [Used copies of the original 1993 edition are plentiful and cheap; there is no need to buy the $75 Longman Classics Edition]


For each week I have listed a set of “Recommended” readings. I do not expect you to read these for class discussion; rather, they are intended to serve as a resource for further investigation, for your literature review or term paper and for comprehensive examination preparation. I have also included at the end of the syllabus a set of topics (and readings) that we will not cover this term.

Auditing this Course

Graduate students are welcome to audit the course. I would advise you to think carefully about your motivation for auditing, however. If you are too busy this term to take the course for credit, consider whether you will really be able to commit the time necessary to get much from the course. But in the end the decision is yours. *Note, however, that auditors must still write and turn in the weekly reaction essays.*
Course Outline

I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS
   Week 0  Introduction and overview
   Week 1  Meaning and measurement of public opinion (September 5)
   Week 2  Citizen Competence: Ignorance, ideology and political reasoning (September 12)

II. INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS
   Week 3  Attitudes and Attitude Change I: Priming and agenda setting (September 19)
   Week 4  Attitudes and Attitude Change II: Framing (September 26)
   Week 5  Groups: Race and the American political system (October 3)
   Week 6  Party Identification I: The unmoved mover? (October 10)
   Week 7  Party identification II: (Attention to) new citizens, new conceptualization? (October 17)

III. POLITICS AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
   Week 8  Campaigns and campaign effects (October 24)
   Week 9  Voting (October 31)
   Week 10 Political participation (November 7)

IV. CONCLUSIONS
   Week 11 Collective opinion: The miracle of aggregation and enlightened preferences (November 14)
   Week 12 Public opinion and American democracy (November 21)
   — No class: Thanksgiving break (November 28)
   Week 13 Symposium (December 5)
Course Schedule

Week 0: Introduction and overview (August 29)

I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Week 1: Meaning and measurement of public opinion (September 5)


Recommended


Week 2: Citizen Competence: Ignorance, ideology and political reasoning (September 12)


http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/08913810608443650


Recommended


Friedman, Jeffrey (ed.). 2006. *Is Democratic Competence Possible?* A special issue of *Critical Review* 18 (1-3).


II. INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS

Week 3: Attitudes and Attitude Change I: Priming and agenda setting (September 19)


Recommended


Week 4: Attitudes and Attitude Change II: Framing (September 26)


Recommended


Week 5: Groups—Race and the American political system (October 3)


Recommended—race and groups in general


Recommended—stereotypes


**Recommended—debates about The Race Card**


**Recommended—authoritarianism**


**Week 6: Party Identification I: The unmoved mover? (October 10)**


**Recommended**


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**Week 7: Party Identification II: (Attention to) new citizens, new conceptualization? (October 17)**


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**IV. POLITICS AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR**

**Week 8: Campaigns and campaign effects (October 24)**


Recommended


Week 9: Voting (October 31)


Recommended


**Week 10: Political participation (November 7)**


**Recommended**


IV. CONCLUSIONS

Week 11: Collective opinion: The miracle of aggregation and enlightened preferences (November 14)


Recommended


Week 12: Public opinion and American Democracy (November 21)


Recommended


Thanksgiving Break (November 28)

Week 13: Symposium (December 5)
V. IMPORTANT OTHER TOPICS YOU WON’T LEARN HERE

Political socialization

Emotion and public opinion

Political Tolerance


Democratic responsiveness: Opinion & public policy


Material Interests (and symbolic politics)


Core values and political principles


Social Context and Deliberation


