This course concerns the joy and magic that is the study of political behavior. In many ways, public opinion is the currency of a representative democracy. It is the expression of what people expect, desire, and think of their government. And it is what politicians follow, influence, and are held accountable to. We will consider the structure and dynamics of public opinion from the perspectives of both American politics and comparative politics. We will analyze what influences public opinion as well as how it shapes other aspects of politics and public life.

This course is part of a two-semester sequence. Participants in the course this semester will be expected to enroll for the second portion of the course next semester.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Course readings are drawn from several texts as well as journal articles. Journal articles are accessible through the library’s website, while book chapters have been placed on the library’s e-reserves.

In addition, the following books will be used the course:


REQUIREMENTS

participation (20% of your final grade)

One important prerequisite of participation is class attendance. Class attendance is vital and required. It is essential to read all of the assigned readings and think carefully about what you have read in advance of the class session. Frantically skimming the articles in the minutes before class begins will limit the quality of our class discussion and impede your ability to learn anything useful. Your education and our class discussion of the readings will both benefit from your careful reading of the articles as well as the time you spend in advance of class reflecting on what you have read and learned.

You will also be expected actively participate in class discussions in a thoughtful way.
discussion leadership (10% of your final grade)

For two weeks during the semester, you will be responsible for leading class discussion. Your goal is to ensure that the class engages in thoughtful reflection about what we can learn from that week’s readings. How you do this is up to you and your fellow discussion leaders. You could spend time discussing the articles individually, engaging the themes that cross different articles, connecting that week’s topic to prior readings, or discussing ways to extend and elaborate on the week’s readings. Your grade will reflect the quality of your preparation, as well as the quantity and quality of class discussion you generate.

short research memos (each is worth 5% of your final grade)

Throughout the course, you will be responsible for writing four short papers that respond to a given week’s readings. These papers should not be summaries of the readings, nor critiques. Instead, you should use the week’s readings as inspiration to propose a possible future research project.

In your memo, develop a plan for how you could empirically extend ideas raised in that week’s readings. Your proposal might extend ideas raised in the studies, or you might propose an interesting question that the authors do not consider. Describe your research question, why it is important and how it would contribute to the literature, the central hypotheses you would want to test, and how you would test your hypotheses.

These papers should be single-spaced and two to three pages in length.

research paper (50% of your final grade)

The final project for this class will be to develop a research paper that tests an interesting question about political behavior in the American context or from a comparative perspective.

This paper should resemble the format of the kinds of academic papers read in class – including development of a research question, a review of relevant literature, theory, tests of these explanations, and interpretation of what you find.

Throughout the semester, there will be a variety of short assignments related to the development of your research paper, such as memos describing your research question, hypotheses, and literature review.

In week 5, you will present the plan for your paper to the rest of the class for feedback, and in week 15, you will present results of your research to the class.

More details about these assignments will be outlined on separate handouts.

CULEARN IS YOUR FRIEND

This syllabus, assignments, and other exciting material can be accessed on the class website on culearn.colorado.edu.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

SOME IMPORTANT COMMENTS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court for additional non-academic sanctions.

All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
AMERICAN AND COMPARATIVE POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. INTRODUCTION

Thursday, August 27

The study of political behavior, approaches and methods

2. BEHAVIOR FROM THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

Thursday, September 3

Approaches to the study of political behavior in American politics, the importance of political context


3. BEHAVIOR FROM THE COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Thursday, September 10

Comparative approaches to behavior, political psychology and political sociology

4. PARTISANSHIP AND IDEOLOGY

Thursday, September 17

The roots of partisanship, genes, socialization


5. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH IDEAS

Thursday, September 24

Student research proposals

6. POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Thursday, October 1


7. MORE ABOUT POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Thursday, October 8

Affective intelligence. Motivated reasoning. Ambivalence.


8. ECONOMIC VOTING

**Thursday, October 15**

*Economic self-interest as a political motive.*


9. PERSUASION AND INFLUENCE

**Thursday, October 22**

*Political socialization, internal versus external influences*


10. PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

**Thursday, October 29**

*Social and political identities, religion, participation in social movements*


- Della Porta, Donatella. 2006. Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1, 6, 7

11. TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Thursday, November 5

Why do people trust government?


12. SOCIAL CAPITAL & CIVIL SOCIETY

Thursday, November 12

Why do people engage in associational life? And why does it matter?


13. VOTER TURNOUT

Thursday, November 19

Why do people turn out to vote? Why do people participate in politics?


Thursday, November 26
Fall break – class does not meet

14. OUTCOMES AND REPRESENTATION

Thursday, December 3

What are the consequences of public opinion?


15. RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Thursday, December 10

Students present the results of their research