

Political Behavior

Baylor University
Political Science (PSC) 4300
Spring 2024

Instructor Information

Dr. Patrick Flavin

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Office location: Burleson 307.01

Office hours: Mondays 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM, Wednesdays 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM
(please email me to set an appointment)

Class Time and Location

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:15 PM

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Course Description and Goals

Why do some people vote while others do not? Why are some people Democrats while others are Republicans and still others claim no party affiliation at all? How much (or little) do Americans actually know about political issues and the leaders they elect? These questions about political behavior are some of the most interesting and important for understanding how American democracy functions. In this class, you will become equipped with the background information and political science tools necessary for answering the questions posed above (and beyond!). Through readings, class discussions, and hands-on assignments, we will study partisanship, the “science” of public opinion polling, what Americans think about salient political issues, how the media influences political behavior, the “paradox of voting,” and why citizens vote for the candidates they do. We’ll also evaluate the link between regular citizens and political elites by assessing the extent to which public opinion influences government policy decisions and examine whether government is more likely to listen to some citizens rather than others. In sum, by taking this class, you will develop a fuller understanding of why people think and act the way they do in the world of politics.

As with any endeavor in life, it is important to set goals at the outset so we can evaluate our performance when we finish. So, after taking this course, you should be able to:

- Read and understand scholarly public opinion and political behavior research
- Evaluate the credibility and accuracy of public opinion polls
- Conduct your own interviews and identify factors that shape political socialization
- Explain competing theories about citizens’ partisanship, policy opinions, and vote choice
- Design your own survey and implement your own original empirical research project

Readings

There is one textbook you will need to acquire for this course. It is available at the Baylor Bookstore or can be purchased online. Make sure you purchase the correct edition!

Elizabeth A. Theiss-Morse and Michael W. Wagner. 2022. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate (15th Edition)*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. ISBN: 9781071822173.

In addition, there are reading assignments posted on our class Canvas page. To access them, go to the Modules tab on the left. I will also post detailed assignment directions, exam study guides, and other important class documents in this tab so you can access them at your convenience.

Course Requirements

Coming to class is a necessary, but not sufficient, part of being an active participant in the learning process. It is also crucial that you read the assigned material for each class completely and carefully. This course does not have hundreds of pages of reading per week. However, it does require very thorough attention to the reading that is assigned. Doing the assigned reading before each class session will provide important background information and greatly enhance what you learn and ultimately take away from this course. In addition, there will be questions on the exams that are taken directly from the readings. So, do the reading. All of it. Every time. If you don't, your grade for this class will suffer.

Your final grade for this class is made up of seven components. The breakdown of the course requirements as a percentage of your final grade is as follows:

100 points (20%)	Exam #1
100 points (20%)	Exam #2
100 points (20%)	Political socialization interview study (6-8 pages)
50 points (10%)	Public opinion survey project pilot survey (3-4 pages)
25 points (5%)	Public opinion survey project class presentation (8-10 minutes)
100 points (20%)	Public opinion survey project final report (10-12 pages)
<u>25 points (5%)</u>	Class attendance (after 2 absences, you lose 5 points for each additional)
500 points (100%)	

Exams

There will be two exams during the semester. They will draw on both class lectures and the assigned readings and are designed so you can demonstrate your understanding of the course material. I will post a detailed study guide prior to the exam to aid your preparation.

The exam will be available on Canvas as a Word document at 6:00 AM on the day of the exam. You are to download the document, type your answers, and then upload your completed exam in the Assignments tab on Canvas by 11:59 PM. Set aside a maximum of 1.5 hours to take the exam and while taking it you are to only use your brain (no class notes, readings, study aids, etc.). The exams will take the place of our class meeting that day.

Political Socialization Interview Study

A person's political socialization during their formative childhood and adolescent years has an enduring impact on their partisanship, policy opinions, political interest/engagement, and general attitudes about American politics as they grow older. So, to understand people now we need to learn about the environment they came from. For this assignment, you will be a political detective whose job is to connect the dots between childhood/adolescent experiences and now. To do so, you will need to interview (at a minimum) five people to learn about their political socialization. I will post a detailed assignment description/grading rubric in advance of the due date.

Public Opinion Survey Project

The most widely used tool to learn about the American public's political opinions and behaviors is the public opinion survey. To achieve a better understanding of polling and gain some hands-on experience, you will formulate an original empirical research question and then construct and field your own public opinion survey to answer that question. As a first step, you will create a Pilot Survey that identifies five political science studies that relate to your research question and a list of survey items you intend to ask respondents (that you will workshop with your classmates). During our final class sessions together, each student will present his/her project to the class who will then offer questions and suggestions. You will submit a Final Report at the end of the semester that reviews and explains your findings. I will post a detailed assignment description/grading rubric for each component in advance of its due date.

Debating Proposed Reforms

Over the course of the semester, we will consider a series of possible policy reforms that relate to public opinion and political behavior in the United States. For each proposed reform, one team of two students will be responsible for researching and presenting the potential advantages and another two student team will do the same for potential disadvantages. After listening to each of the presentations, we will discuss/debate the reform as a class and then hold a vote on whether it should be adopted.

Class Attendance

Students who regularly miss class will not do well in this course. At the beginning of every class, I will pass an attendance sign-in sheet around the classroom. It is your responsibility to make sure you sign the sheet for every class session. If you do not sign the sheet, you will be counted as absent for that day.

Each student is allowed two unexcused absences during the semester without penalty. For the third and each subsequent absence, a student will lose 5 points (1% of their final course grade) from the Class Attendance component of their grade. In accordance with the Baylor University College of Arts and Sciences' official attendance policy, any student who misses more than seven class sessions (i.e. attends less than 75% of the classes) will automatically receive a failing grade for the semester. So, you are strongly encouraged to attend each and every class session. If you have any questions about your attendance record during the semester, please contact me.

Questions About Graded Assignments

I am happy to answer any questions about your grade on an exam or written assignment. However, you are required to wait 24 hours after the grade is posted before contacting me to discuss your grade.

Letter Grade Breakdown

I will use the following metric when calculating your semester letter grade. Please note that there will be no “rounding up” for borderline grades. You can view your scores for completed assignments at any time during the semester on our class Canvas page in the Grades tab.

A	465-500 points	(93-100% of the total points possible)
A-	450-464	(90-92.8%)
B+	435-449	(87-89.8%)
B	415-434	(83-86.8%)
B-	400-414	(80-82.8%)
C+	385-399	(77-79.8%)
C	365-384	(73-76.8%)
C-	350-364	(70-72.8%)
D+	335-349	(67-69.8%)
D	315-334	(63-66.8%)
D-	300-314	(60-62.8%)
F	299 or less	(less than 60%)

Late Assignments Policy

Assignments that are uploaded to Canvas late will still be accepted, but with a penalty. For each part of a 24 hour period the assignment is late, your grade will be reduced by 10 points. For example, if you submit your paper two hours late, you will incur a 10 point deduction. If your paper is one day and two hours late, you will incur a 20 point deduction; and so on. So, it certainly benefits you to get all assignments submitted on time.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism or any form of cheating involves a breach of student-teacher trust. This means that any work submitted under your name is expected to be your own, neither composed by anyone else as a whole or in part, nor handed over to another person for complete or partial revision. Be sure to document all ideas that are not your own. Instances of plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council and may result in failure of the course. Not understanding plagiarism is not an excuse. I expect you, as a Baylor student, to be intimately familiar with the Honor Code at: <http://www.baylor.edu/honorcode/>.

Baylor University Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX

Baylor University does not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, color, disability, national origin, ancestry, age (over 40), citizenship, genetic

information or the refusal to submit to a genetic test, past, current, or prospective service in the uniformed services, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal, Texas, or local law (collectively referred to as Protected Characteristics).

If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience involving:

1. Sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, intimate partner violence, or retaliation for reporting one of these types of prohibited conduct, please visit www.baylor.edu/titleix, call 254.710.8454, or email TitleIX_Coordinator@baylor.edu.
2. Harassment (excluding those issues listed in #1) or adverse action based on Protected Characteristics, please visit www.baylor.edu/civilrights, call 254.710.7100, or email Civil_Rights@baylor.edu.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student who needs academic accommodations related to a documented disability should inform me immediately at the beginning of the semester. You are required to obtain appropriate documentation and information regarding your accommodations from the Office of Access and Learning Accommodation (OALA). Stop by the first floor of Sid Richardson, East Wing in the Paul L. Foster Success Center or call 254.710.3605 or email OALA@baylor.edu.

Detailed Reading/Assignment Schedule for the Semester

Below, I list the class topic and assigned reading for each day of our semester together. You should have the assigned reading completed in time for the class session it is listed next to. So, for example, you should read “Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don’t” on Canvas before coming to class on Monday, January 22. Dates when assignments are due (posted to Canvas by 11:59 PM) are indicated with **BOLD LETTERS**.

The following abbreviations are used to indicate where to find the assigned reading for each class session:

- **PBAE** = *Political Behavior of the American Electorate* (textbook)
- **C** = Reading available on our class Canvas page (Modules → Class Readings)

Day	Date	Class Topic	Reading/Assignment Due
Wednesday	January 17	Introductions and syllabus	Read syllabus carefully
Monday	January 22	What is political behavior? Why and how should we study it?	C: “Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don’t”
Wednesday	January 24	From the start: Political learning and socialization	PBAE Ch. 1
Monday	January 29	Party time! Political partisanship	PBAE Ch. 5
Wednesday	January 31	The “science” of public opinion polling	C: “The Evolution of Election Polling in the U.S.”

Monday	February 5	The “science” of public opinion polling (continued)	(1) PBAE Appendix (2) C: “How Are Polls Conducted?”
Wednesday	February 7	American public opinion (micro level)	PBAE Ch. 6
Monday	February 12	American public opinion (macro level)	DUE: Political Socialization Interview Study
Wednesday	February 14	How much (or little) do Americans know about politics? Reform Debate #1	C: “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind”
Monday	February 19	How much (or little) do the media influence citizens’ political opinions and behavior?	PBAE Ch. 7
Wednesday	February 21	EXAM #1	
Monday	February 26	Who votes? Why do we vote? Reform Debate #2	PBAE Ch. 3
Wednesday	February 28	NO CLASS	
Monday	March 4	SPRING BREAK!	
Wednesday	March 6	SPRING BREAK!	
Monday	March 11	The big decision: Vote choice	PBAE Ch. 8
Wednesday	March 13	Political polarization Reform Debate #3	C: “The Polarized American Electorate: The Rise of Partisan-Ideological Consistency and Its Consequences”
Monday	March 18	Social capital	C: “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America”
Wednesday	March 20	Political participation beyond voting Reform Debate #4	PBAE Ch. 4
Monday	March 25	Public attitudes about democracy and citizenship Reform Debate #5	C: “Political Trust in a Cynical Age”
Wednesday	March 27	Workshop your Pilot Survey with classmates	DUE: Pilot Survey
Monday	April 1	NO CLASS – HAPPY EASTER!	

Wednesday	April 3	How citizens and candidates/campaigns interact	PBAE Ch. 2
Monday	April 8	DIADELOSO!	
Tuesday	April 9	Political inequality Reform Debate #6	C: "Would the Dream of Political Equality Turn out to Be a Nightmare?"
Wednesday	April 10	Government representation of public opinion and the quality of American democracy	C: "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens"
Monday	April 15	EXAM #2	
Wednesday	April 17	Student project presentations	Conduct opinion survey & work on final report
Monday	April 22	Student project presentations	↓
Wednesday	April 24	Student project presentations	
Monday	April 29	Student project presentations	
Wednesday	May 1	Student project presentations	
Tuesday	May 7		