POLS 341: Political Participation and Behavior

Fall Semester 2018
Monday and Wednesday 12:30-1:45 pm; Room DU 459
Professor April K. Clark
Office: Zulauf 402
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-11:00 am or by appt.
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Description:
This course examines the origins, content, and impact of voting and political participation. We will address several broad questions: Who votes and why? Which groups are underrepresented at the polls and why? What implication does nonvoting have for the political system? Is a nation better off when large numbers of individuals fail to vote? Are Americans making up for their low turnout rates through other means of participation? How much influence do the campaigns and mass media have on the electorate’s attitudes and political choices? How do party loyalties, candidates’ personalities, and issues influence voters’ choices among candidates? What can be done to increase turnout levels in the U.S.?

In addressing these questions, specific topics of focus include factors that explain citizens’ vote choices and the strategies used by candidates and their campaigns to win these votes. Additional consideration will be given to structural and individual factors influencing participation in the United States, the consequences of political participation, and the influence of participation on elections and policy outcomes. This is an “American Politics” class, and examples and analyses in class discussion will focus predominantly on elections and voting cross-nationally and at various levels of government in the United States. However, students are invited to explore foreign electoral systems and politics in this course for purposes of class discussion and research.

Goals of the Course:
Upon completion of this course, you should be able to understand many things about voting, campaigns and elections in America:

- You will understand why some people choose to vote and others do not.
- You will be able to explain why the United States has a lower voter turnout than other industrial democracies.
- You will be able to compare and contrast different theories developed by political scientists to explain citizens’ vote choices.
- You will understand how campaign messages are tailored to different segments of society.
- You will develop the analytic tools to critically assess media messages about candidates and their campaigns.
- You will understand the ways in which you can take a more active part in doing electoral politics, instead of just being a spectator or an isolated analyst.
- You will understand the influence that public opinion has on electoral politics.
- You will understand changes and trends in American elections.
- You will understand how campaigns and elections affect public policy and governance.
- You will be able to debate the major contemporary issues facing campaign and election reform.
- You will able to discuss the merits and drawbacks of different proposed campaign reforms.
**Class Schedule:**

Class meets Mondays and Wednesdays, from 12:30-1:45 pm, during the 16-week term – August 27 through December 5, 2018. The final exam is **Monday, December 10th, Noon-1:50 p.m.**

**Course Readings:**

Most of the course readings include book chapters and journal articles, available via the course Blackboard site, the school’s library link to JSTOR, and/or I have provided the web address.

To find the library readings click on the library “Article Databases” tab located at: [http://www.ulib.niu.edu/](http://www.ulib.niu.edu/) click on the “Browse Databases Alphabetically” and select “J” and then scroll to “JSTOR” and search for the title of the article in the window. The titles of the articles are given in the reading schedule below. All articles can then be read online or printed out.

**Additional Readings:**

Some class materials may be distributed via the Blackboard course site so make sure you check the site regularly (i.e. daily). This includes making sure that your email account in Blackboard is current or you may miss out on important on important course communications.

**The Newspaper:**

It should come as no surprise in a political participation and behavior class that you are expected to keep up with political news. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. Our discussions in class will frequently touch on previous or upcoming federal, state, and local campaigns and elections, often as a way to illustrate a concept from lecture or a reading. Regularly consuming the news not only will bring course material to life, but undoubtedly it will make the class more interesting. (And as a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

You are free to read (in print or online) any paper(s) of your choosing, with one limitation: You need to choose a news source that includes frequent coverage of national politics. The following are a few suggestions, any of which are excellent sources of political news:

- The Washington Post: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) (requires free online registration)
- The Wall Street Journal: [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com) (requires paid online subscription)
- The New York Times: [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com) (requires free online registration)
- The Los Angeles Times: [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)
Course Requirements:

Students will be evaluated based on four components:

- **Lecture Reading/Participation (considered in borderline cases):** Readings will be assigned for most class meetings. Even though you will not be formally graded on participation in lecture, you are expected to attend all classes, read the assigned readings before each class, and participate actively during the lecture in order to get the most of the course. Good attendance and participation will be taken into consideration to decide borderline letter grade cases. “Class participation” means being prepared for the material to be covered in class each day, asking thought-provoking questions, and providing insightful answers in class.

- **A midterm examination (30%):** The midterm will be held in class Wednesday, October 17th. The midterm will consist of multiple-choice and written response questions designed to test your understanding of the readings covered up to this point.

- **A final examination (35%):** The final exam is Monday, December 10th, Noon-1:50 p.m. It will be comprehensive though focusing more heavily on material covered since the midterm, and will consist of a similar format as the midterm.

- **Term paper (35%):** The term paper (8-10 pages) will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, December 3rd. All papers must be typed, double-spaced with standard margins (approximately 1” all around), and use a font no smaller than 12-point. Papers must include page numbers and be stapled together. **Any paper not stapled or in compliance with the formatting requirements outlined above will automatically receive a full letter-grade deduction.** E-mailed papers will not be accepted, notwithstanding absolutely exceptional documented emergency circumstances. If you fail to turn your paper in at the **beginning** of class on the day it is due, you will receive a grade reduction (i.e. A becomes a B). For everyday it is late you will continue to lose an entire grade and if I do not receive your paper by the last day of class (Monday, December 10th) you will receive a **ZERO** for the paper, **NO EXCEPTIONS.** More information on the paper requirements are provided at the end of the syllabus. My advice is to start working on this early.

Course Grading:

The breakdown of grading for each piece of work will be as follows:

Midterm Exam – 30%
Final Exam – 35%
Term Paper – 35%
Class Participation (considered in borderline cases)

Course Grades will be distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Average</th>
<th>Final Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>90-100 %</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>80-89 %</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>70-79%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>60-69%</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Below 60%</td>
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*Final course grades will be submitted in compliance with NIU’s plus/minus (+/-) grading system.*
Basic Policies

Missed exams: Makeup exams will only be given in extraordinary circumstances. If such circumstances arise, please contact the instructor as soon as possible and before the scheduled exam. To keep the process fair for everyone in the course, students will be required to support requests for makeup exams with official documentation. A signed note from your mother does not suffice. A missed examination without prior notification and a documented excuse will result in a ZERO.

Handouts: Handouts are a privilege for those students who attend class on a regular basis. No student is entitled to supplemental materials simply because they are registered for the course.

Classroom Etiquette: Attendance at all class sessions is expected, and the instructor will periodically check attendance. Active and informed participation in class discussion will make for a better class, and can notably boost a student’s final grade. Participation can also significantly help students in borderline grade situations. Students are expected to arrive at class on time. Late arrivals disrupt the class and will be treated as class absences. Students are to remain for the entire session unless excused by the professor beforehand or confronted with a serious personal emergency. It is not acceptable for students to walk in and out of class to answer cell phones, take casual bathroom and smoking breaks, or attend to other personal matters. Please silence your cell phone prior to the start of each lecture. It is absolutely unacceptable to sleep, use an iPod, read a newspaper, use a laptop for anything other than taking class notes, or engage in other behavior that distracts the instructor or other students from class once it has begun. No one should talk while someone else is talking; this includes comments meant for a classmate rather than the entire group. Overall, classroom dialogue and behavior should always be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university. For more information, see: http://www.niu.edu/judicial/Code_of_Conduct.pdf

Note taking: Although PowerPoint will be used for the purposes of presenting class material it is imperative that students take their own detailed notes during lectures. The PowerPoint slides provide a broad outline of discussion topics but do not cover everything. If you miss class for whatever reason, be sure to obtain the notes from someone else in class (making a friend in class is always a good idea).

Incomplete Requests: Such petitions will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances. The instructor reserves the right to ask for documentation to verify the problem preventing completion of the course by the normal deadlines. If the student does not present documentation from a university office or official, the matter will be left to the instructor’s discretion.

Honor Code: Any written work for this class will be checked electronically through on-line databases to assess the originality of the work.

Academic Dishonesty: Any written work for this class will be checked electronically through on-line databases to assess the originality of the work. Regarding plagiarism, the NIU Undergraduate Catalog states: "Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university." The above statement encompasses a paper written in whole or in part by another; a paper copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from another source; a paper copied in part from one or more sources without proper identification and acknowledgment of the sources; a paper that is merely a paraphrase of one or more sources, using ideas and/or logic without credit even though the actual words may be changed; and a paper that quotes, summarizes or paraphrases, or cuts and pastes words, phrases, or images from an Internet source without identification and the address of the web site. In addition, while students may work collaboratively to complete assignments and in preparation for exams, any completed work that is turned into the instructor must be the student’s own work i.e. written in their own words and outlining their logic or calculations where appropriate or requested.
Students with Disabilities: A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Disabilities Resource Center, (2) meet with the Disabilities Resource Center to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university – requests for retroactive accommodations are not accepted. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Disabilities Resource Center will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Disabilities Resource Center in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Disabilities Resource Center at [https://niu.edu/disability/](https://niu.edu/disability/) or 815-753-1303.

Writing Center: NIU provides a writing center that can assist students in formulating, developing, and revising course assignments. Do not be scared or embarrassed to ask for assistance if you feel you would benefit from it. The university provides these resources in order to help students better reach their academic goals. Information regarding the writing center can be found at: [http://www.niu.edu/uwc/](http://www.niu.edu/uwc/)

Department of Political Science website: Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, research career options including internship opportunities, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to [http://polisci.niu.edu](http://polisci.niu.edu)

Undergraduate Writing Awards: The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department’s spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for $100. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year’s competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies must have two cover pages – one with the student’s name and one without the student’s name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published in the department e-announcements. You may also contact the department for information at 815-753-1011.

Exams and grading. Regrades on assignments are possible if you believe there was an error in grading. In order to have a reconsideration of your grade, you must provide a 1-page typewritten memo explaining where you feel the mistake in grading occurred, and I will take a look at it.
Course Calendar (additional readings may be added):

The following calendar lists the order of the topics and the date that we will cover them. Courses sometimes do not go as planned and you should be ready to diverge from this syllabus. Any significant changes will be clearly announced in class. You are responsible to stay up to date on course happenings. **You should read the texts before coming to class, and try to get an early start on the term paper.**

**Week 1:**

**Aug. 27 Introduction, Expectations, Plan for the summer session**

Discuss syllabus and class schedule

**Aug. 29 Background: Is American Democracy Under Threat?**

Vox, “20 of America's top political scientists gathered to discuss our democracy. They're scared,” October 13, 2017.


Outside the Beltway Blog by Steven L. Taylor is Professor of Political Science and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Troy University, “Challenges to the Health of American Democracy - Democratic norms are eroding,” January 28, 2018.


**Week 2:**

**Sept. 3 No Class – Labor Day Holiday**

**Sept. 5 Turnout and Trends: Worldwide and in the American States**

Voter Turnout Rates from a Comparative Perspective (through page 91 only) By Rafael López Pintor, Maria Gratschew and Kate Sullivan.

24/7 Wall St., “States With the Highest (and Lowest) Voter Turnout,” February 4, 2016.

New York Times, “The Worst Voter Turnout in 72 Years,”

PBS, “Why is voter turnout so low in the U.S.?”, November 6, 2016.
Sept. 5 Turnout and Trends: Worldwide and in the American States (continued)


Pew Report, August 16, 2018 – “As Midterms Near, Democrats Are More Politically Active Than Republicans No partisan gap in views of election’s importance.”

Week 3:

Sept. 10, 12 Measurement, Forms, and Purpose of Political Participation


Explaining Political Participation

Week 4: Context: Electoral Institutions and Party Systems

Sept. 17, 19


Week 4: Context: Electoral Institutions and Party Systems (continued)


Week 5:

Sept. 24 Context: Economic Factors


Sept. 26 Context: Groups and Mobilization


Sept. 26  Context: Groups and Mobilization (continued)


**Week 6:**

**Oct. 1 How We Vote: Individual Variability - Traditional Models of Vote Choice**


1. The “Columbia” Model: social forces


2. The “Michigan” Model: party identification and the “normal vote”

3. The “Chicago/Rochester” Model: rational choice and utility maximization

**Oct. 3 How We Vote: Individual Variability - Issue Voting, Retrospective, and Economic Voting**


**Week 7:**

**Oct. 8, 10 How We Vote: Individual Variability – Social-Psychological Resources**

_Socioeconomic biases in participation, the resource model of participation; Emotions and personality trait_


**Week 8:**

**Oct. 15 How We Vote: Individual Variability – Social Pressure**


Oct. 15 How We Vote: Individual Variability – Social Pressure (continued)


Oct. 17

**********MIDTERM EXAM – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17TH**********

**Week 9: Online Politics: Mobilization, Political Learning, and Advocacy**

Oct. 22, 24


Clay Shirky, (2011), The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change, in Foreign Affairs, Jan/Febr, [online], available at: https://www.cc.gatech.edu/~beki/cs4001/Shirky.pdf


Week 10: Protest participation

Oct. 29, 31

Boston University Research – “Counting Protests Maps built from the “Count Love” project reveal patterns in American protests” available at: https://www.bu.edu/research/articles/counting-american-protests/


Week 11:

Nov. 5, 7 Media, Candidates, Campaigns and Framing


**Week 12:**

**Nov. 12  Elite Cues and Issue Framing**


**Nov. 14  Partisan Preferences, Ideological Positions, Group Characteristics and Political Participation**


**Week 13:**

**Nov. 19 Group Characteristics and Political Participation**

Nov. 19 Group Characteristics and Political Participation (continued)

**Age and Participation** - Age effects and turnout, Political socialization and participation.


CIRCLE Report – “Young Voters in the 2016 General Election - Data and analysis of youth turnout, vote choice, and composition of electorate.”

Pew Research Center – “Younger generations make up a majority of the electorate, but may not be a majority of voters this November” - June 14, 2018.


**Political Participation of Minorities: Race & Ethnicity**


**Political Participation and Gender**

Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics (CAWP), Rutgers University – Gender Differences in Voter Turnout – July 20, 2017.


Nov. 21 – No Class

**********THANKSGIVING BREAK – NOV. 21-25**********
**Week 14:**

Nov. 26, 28 Does Participation Matter? Outcomes, Representation, Inequalities in Participation


**Week 15:**

Assignments Due:

Term paper due at the **beginning** of class on **Monday, December 3**

Dec. 3 Does Participation Matter? Outcomes, Representation, Inequalities in Participation, Continued


Dec. 5 Wrap-Up and Review

**********FINAL EXAM – MONDAY DECEMBER 10th, Noon-1:50 p.m.**********

**Summary of Important Dates**
Midterm Exam – Week 8 – **Wednesday, October 17**
Final Exam – Week 16 - **Monday, December 10** at Noon-1:50 p.m.
Term Paper Due - Week 15 - at the **beginning** of class on **Monday, December 3**

POLS 341 Political Participation and Behavior
**Words of Advice for How to Do Well in this Course**

- Do the reading assignments before class.
- Take notes on copies of the readings and lecture materials.
- Participate in class discussions.
- Ask questions!
- Study before exams.
- Make sure the professor knows your name AND associates it with good things.