

PSCI 5308: American Political Behavior, Spring 2009

Section 261: M 7:30–10:00 p.m., Killam 102

Dr. Christopher N. Lawrence <christopher.lawrence@tamiu.edu>

Office: 313 Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center (LBVSC)

Hours: M 5:50–7:30 p.m., TuTh 10:50 a.m.–1:00 p.m., or by appointment

Phone: (956) 326-2467

This course is organized around two broad questions: How do people form and express their political beliefs? How do those beliefs influence their choices in elections?

At the heart of a representative democracy lies the transmission of the will of the citizenry to the government. In order to have a full understanding of the shape of government and the choices made by the citizens, we must first comprehend what the “public will” is and how it is formed. The truth about public opinion is that it is often fractious and malleable. What does this mean for our democracy? How do people form opinions? How do citizens process information to create our political evaluations? How is public opinion measured? What is the role of the media with respect to our opinions? These are just a few of the questions we will address in our quest to better understand public opinion in the United States and other democratic societies.

We will also look at the role public opinion plays in the decisions that voters make, both in terms of whether or not they participate and what choice(s) they make in the voting booth. We will also examine other factors that influence voter decision-making, including the roles of political parties, political institutions (including government and laws), and political candidates.

As a graduate course in political science, another important focus of this course is to expose you to the methods employed by political scientists and other social scientists to understand mass political behavior.

Finally, this course is a *seminar*. While I, as the instructor, will often lecture and lead the discussion in the course, your participation and reading is key to the success of the class. You are expected to complete the readings *prior to class* and to be prepared to discuss their content with your fellow students.

Students should already be familiar with the fundamental features of the United States political system from a course such as PSCI 2305: American National Government, or the equivalent undergraduate course at another institution (such as Texas course equivalency numbers GOVT 2301–2302 or GOVT 2305). Students should also be familiar with basic social scientific research methods (PSCI 3301, PSCI 5301, or equivalent courses in fields such as sociology, psychology, or economics).

Student Learning Objectives: Ideally, at the conclusion of this course, you will have a greater understanding of

- ▷ the distinctions between political institutions and political behavior and their importance in understanding the American political process.
- ▷ how political processes in the United States compare with those of other advanced industrial democracies.
- ▷ the *political socialization* process (how individuals learn the essential features of the political process and become citizens)
- ▷ how citizens form and articulate opinions about government.
- ▷ how citizens participate in the political process through voting and other means.

Required Materials: There are **six** books required for this course:

- ▷ Russel J. Dalton. 2008. *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 5th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-0-87289-537-9.
- ▷ Carroll J. Glynn et al. 2004. *Public Opinion*, 2nd ed. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press. ISBN 978-0-8133-4172-9.
- ▷ Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2004. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-10156-0.
- ▷ Michael S. Lewis-Beck, William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. ISBN 978-0-472-05040-6.
- ▷ Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg, eds. 2001. *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 4th ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-1-56802-334-2.
- ▷ John Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-40786-9.

These textbooks should be available, new and used, at the TAMIU Bookstore in the Student Center; you may also be able to order them on-line at a discount.

Additional readings may be assigned at the discretion of the professor and will be provided for you at the library reserve desk, on the course Angel site, or as handouts in class.

Assignments and Grading: Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements:

Final Exam	35%
Research Design	10%
Final Research Paper	20%
Research Presentation	5%
Article Reviews (2)	10%
Discussion Leading	10%
Class Participation	10%

The following letter grades will be assigned in this course:

Final Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C*	D*	F*
Grade Points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

* The grade of “D” is a failing grade in graduate school (in other words, you must retake this course if you want it to count towards your degree), and no more than two “C”s may count for credit towards a master’s degree in any TAMIU graduate program. In addition, you must maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA (“B” average) to remain in good standing.

Exams: The final exam will be an open-book, in-class examination, consisting of short-answer and essay questions. Per college policy, the final exam is *comprehensive*.

Research Paper: The research paper will be approximately 15–18 pages in length in which you will engage in an empirical, quantitative research project in mass political behavior in the United States or another democratic political context.

You will turn in the paper topic on or before **Wednesday, February 11**. After selecting an appropriate topic, you will write a research design paper in which you:

1. explain the relevance of the topic;

2. conduct a literature review critiquing *at least ten* items of previous literature on (or directly related to) the topic, which must have appeared in academic journals, conference proceedings, or scholarly books (other sources may also be used, but will not count as items of literature for this requirement);
3. propose a hypothesis (or hypotheses); and
4. explain how this hypothesis (or these hypotheses) will be tested.

This paper will be due on **Friday, March 29**. You will then complete the research paper by:

1. conducting an original analysis of the data;
2. presenting and discussing the results of the data analysis; and
3. describing the conclusions you arrive at based on the outcome of your analysis.

This paper will be due on the last day of the semester (**Friday, May 1**).

Your paper must be an individual effort; you may consult with me, the TAMIU Writing Center, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work. The paper will be due on the last day of the course.

The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12 point), with one-inch margins and including page numbers.¹ You should include a title page with the date, title, and appropriate identifying information.

The paper must consistently utilize the citation style of the [American Political Science Association](#), include a full bibliography listing the works cited in your paper, and be written in standard English using coherent prose and acceptable grammar. Please refer to *The Style Manual for Political Science* published by the APSA for a complete guide to the proper use of APSA style.²

Class Discussion: As this course is a graduate class, students are expected to participate regularly in class discussions about the assigned readings. To provide an incentive for regular participation, a student will be assigned to be *discussion leaders* for each topic on the syllabus; these students will be expected to be prepared to help shepherd class discussion on the topic—perhaps through the use of prepared questions, an outline of themes, or other means.

Class Policies: As this course is a *seminar*, it is your responsibility to have completed the readings prior to class and to be ready to discuss them with your fellow students. I realize that many of you have daytime employment and/or other obligations, but that does not relieve you of the responsibility to devote out-of-class time to this course. While I, as the professor, will sometimes lead the discussion or elaborate on particular readings and themes, you are expected to contribute to the success of the class as well.

As graduate students, you are solely responsible for your performance in the course and attendance. I am always happy to meet with students to discuss their concerns about the course, but I will not necessarily assume that you are in difficulty simply because you perform poorly on an assignment or disappear from class for a few days.

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), and abuse of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class) during class

¹Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond, etc. “Typewriter-style” (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are not acceptable.

²Students majoring in fields other than political science may use the accepted citation style of their major field.

will adversely affect your grade; per university policy, repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class *on time* and mute (or switch off) all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class.

I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. You will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of any materials provided on the textbook website or the textbook's study guide (if applicable). Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with the Student Disability Services office for assistance.

Copies of all out-of-class written assignments must be submitted **both** in paper (hard copy) format to the professor and in the appropriate TurnItIn.com "drop box" on the TAMIU Angel E-Learning website. In the event that the timeliness of an assignment is in question, the time submitted to Angel will be used as the definitive record of when the assignment was received (provided the hard copy is substantially identical). The professor reserves the right to not grade any assignment not received in a timely fashion in *both* formats.

Any extra-credit opportunities offered by the professor will be offered to **all** students on an equal basis. Please do not ask the professor for individualized extra credit opportunities.

This syllabus is subject to revision by the professor.

Grade Appeals: If you wish to dispute a grade on a particular assignment for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

For appeals regarding your final grade in the course, please consult the Student Handbook and Catalog for procedures. (Please also consult the section on plagiarism and cheating below.)

University and College Policies: The following policies of the TAMIU College of Arts and Sciences and Texas A&M International University are reproduced here for your information; you may already be familiar with them from other courses, but please review them.

STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS: All students must obtain a TAMIU email address and have access to the Angel E-Learning system. Students should check their TAMIU email on a regular basis.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR DROPPING A COURSE: It is the student's responsibility to drop the course before the designated drop date. Faculty are not responsible for dropping students who stop attending class.

OFFICE HOURS: Your professor will keep regular office hours, as posted above, and appointments can be made to accommodate students' schedules. The door will be open for all students on a "first-come, first-served" basis when no appointment has been previously scheduled.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Texas A&M International University seeks to promote reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. This University will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required to afford equal educational opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with the Student Disability Services office and to contact the faculty member in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR: The College of Arts and Sciences encourages classroom discussion and academic debate as an essential intellectual activity. It is essential that students learn to express and defend their beliefs, but it is also essential that they learn to listen and respond respectfully to others whose beliefs they may not share. The College will always tolerate diverse, unorthodox, and unpopular points of view, but it will not tolerate condescending or insulting remarks. When students verbally abuse or ridicule and intimidate others whose views they do not agree with, they subvert the free exchange of ideas that should characterize a university classroom. If their actions are deemed by the professor to be disruptive, they will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include being involuntarily withdrawn from the class.

COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS: The Copyright Act of 1976, as amended by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, grants to copyright owners the exclusive right to reproduce their works and distribute copies of their work. Works that receive copyright protection include published works such as a textbook. Copying a textbook without permission from the owner of the copyright may constitute a copyright infringement. Civil and criminal penalties may be assessed for copyright infringement. Civil penalties include damages up to \$100,000; criminal penalties include a fine up to \$250,000 and imprisonment.

PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING: Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work as one's own work. Recently the internet has complicated the issue. Taking from the internet and presenting it as one's own work is still plagiarism. Copying another student's paper or a portion of the paper is called "copying." Neither plagiarism nor copying will be tolerated. Should a faculty member discover that a student committed plagiarism, the student will receive a grade of "F" in that course and the matter will be referred to the TAMIU Honor Council for possible disciplinary action. Per university policy, you have the right to appeal any such penalty according to procedures published in the faculty and student handbooks.

INCOMPLETES: Incompletes are discouraged and are assigned only under extenuating circumstances. College policy mandates 70% of course requirements must be met before an "I" can be considered. In fairness to those students who complete the course as scheduled, under no circumstances will an incomplete ("I") be changed to an "A" unless the student has experienced a death in the immediate family or has a written medical excuse from a physician.

Course Outline: Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Angel. We will not necessarily read books in the order they appear on the syllabus; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance of* the designated class dates.

While the professor may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

Readings marked as *optional* are recommended for students planning future doctoral studies in political science.

Jan 12 Introduction; What is Public Opinion?

Empiricism and behavioralism in political science
The basics: What is public opinion? Why should we care?
The history of public opinion
Beliefs, attitudes, and opinions
Glynn, ch. 1–2.
Dalton, ch. 1–2.
Zaller, ch. 1–2.

Jan 19 Martin Luther King Holiday: No Class

Jan 26 Measuring Public Opinion

Sampling and measurement error; accuracy and precision
True attitudes as unobservable variables
The psychology of the survey response
Glynn, ch. 3.
Converse, “Attitudes and Non-Attitudes” (R).
Zaller, ch. 3–5 (read *after* Converse).

Feb 2 Psychological Perspectives on Opinion Formation

Conditioning theories
Consistency theories
Judgment-based theories
Motivational theories (including the Zaller RAS model)
The “competing considerations” model of Alvarez and Brehm
Glynn, ch. 4.
Alvarez and Brehm, “American Ambivalence Towards Abortion Policy” (R)

Feb 9 Sociological Perspectives

Stereotyping
Group Norms
Perception and opinion formation
Glynn, ch. 5–6.
Conover, “The Influence of Group Identifications on Political Perception and Evaluation.” (R)

Feb 16 Political Socialization; Contemporary Perspectives on Opinion Formation

Sears and Levy, “Childhood and adult political development,” from *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. (R)
Lau, “Models of Decision Making,” from *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (R)
Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan, “A Social-Cognitive Model of Candidate Appraisal,” from *Information and Democratic Processes* (R)
Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida, “Individual and Contextual Variations in Political Candidate Appraisal” (from March 1994 *APSR*) (R)
Huffmon, “Revisiting the Role of Information Format in Candidate Evaluation: An ‘Update’ Model of Evaluation” (from *The Journal of Political Science*) (R)
Masters and Sullivan, “Nonverbal behavior and leadership: Emotion and cognition in political information processing,” ch. 6 of *Explorations in Political Psychology*

Feb 23 Political Knowledge and Public Opinion

What is political sophistication?

Does political sophistication matter?

Glynn, ch. 8.

Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (R).

Lawrence, "Should Voters Be Encyclopedias?" (R).

Optional (Comparative): Sekhon, "The Varying Role of Voter Information across Democratic Societies" (R).

Mar 2 Voting Behavior; Participation, Turnout, and Protest

Lewis-Beck, ch. 5.

Dalton, ch. 3–4

From Niemi and Weisberg: "The Study of Voting and Elections."; "Why Is Voter Turnout Low (And Why Is It Declining)?"; Putnam; Rosenstone and Hansen; Franklin.

Mar 9 Party Systems and Realignment

Critical Elections and Realignment

The 1960s Realignments in America and Europe

Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections." (R)

Dalton, ch. 5–7.

Lewis-Beck, ch. 10.

From Niemi and Weisberg: "Is the Party System Changing?"; Stanley and Niemi, "Party Coalitions in Transition"; Aldrich and Niemi, "The Sixth American Party System."

Optional: Beck, "A Socialization Theory of Partisan Realignment" (R); Campbell, "Surge and Decline" (R).

Mar 16–20 Spring Break: No Class

Mar 23 Traditional Models of Vote Choice

The "Columbia" Model: social forces

The "Michigan" Model: party identification and the "normal vote"

The "Chicago/Rochester" Model: rational choice and utility maximization

Glynn et al., ch. 7

Dalton, ch. 8–9

Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 1–2, 11–12.

From Niemi and Weisberg: "What Determines the Vote?"; Miller and Shanks; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau.

Mar 30 Issue Voting; Retrospective Voting

Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 8, 13

Dalton, ch. 10

From Niemi and Weisberg: Nadeau and Lewis-Beck.

Barth, Overby, and Huffmon, "Community Context, Personal Contact, and Support for an Anti-Gay Rights Referendum." (R)

Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting" (R)

Optional (comparative): Powell and Whitten, "A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting" (R);

Whitten and Palmer, "Cross-National Analyses of Economic Voting" (R)

Apr 6 Party Identification

Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 6–7.

Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, ch. 1–5, 8.

From Niemi and Weisberg: "How Much Does Politics Affect Party Identification?"; Miller; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, "Macropartisanship: The Permanent Memory of Partisan Evaluation."

Optional: Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, ch. 6–7.

Apr 9 Drop Date

Apr 13 Political Sophistication Revisited: Vote Choice, Information, and Political Sophistication

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Does Lack of Political Information Matter?”; Althaus, “Information Effects in Collective Preferences”; Lau and Redlawsk, “Voting Correctly”; Page and Shapiro, “Rational Public Opinion”

Lawrence, “The Role of Political Sophistication in Retrospective Evaluations of Coalition Performance...” (R)

Bartels, “Homer Gets a Tax Cut.” (R)

Zaller, ch. 10.

Optional: Gilens, “Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences.” (R); Goren, “Political Expertise and Issue Voting in Presidential Elections.” (R)

Apr 20 Ticket-Splitting and Divided Government

From Niemi and Weisberg: “Do Voters Prefer Divided Government?”; Fiorina; Burden and Kimball. Smith et al., “Party Balancing and Voting for Congress in the 1996 National Election” (R)

Apr 27 Research Presentations

Monday, May 4, 8:00–11:00 p.m. Final Exam