

# PSCI 3214: Political Participation, Spring 2012

CRN 17711: MWF 1:25–2:15 p.m., Torgersen 1020.

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This course, as the title suggests, is an introduction to *political participation*, broadly defined; specifically, the ways in which citizens in the United States and other democratic societies involve themselves in the political system and seek to influence it. As such, in addition to discussing specific forms of participation (most notably *voting*), we will also discuss mass political behavior more broadly, including the role of *public opinion*.

In general, students should have already completed an introductory course in American Government and Politics, such as Virginia Tech PSCI 1014 or the equivalent, prior to taking this course. PSCI 1024 (Comparative Government and Politics) and PSCI 2024 (Research Methods) are not prerequisites, but some familiarity with the material from those courses may also be beneficial.

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

- ▷ Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rhode. 2011. *Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections*. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-1-60871-798-9.
- ▷ Russell 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.

These textbooks should be available, new and used, at various textbook stores around Blacksburg; 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 site in *Scholar*, or as handouts in class.

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

Midterm Exam	20%	Research Paper	20%
Final Exam	20%	Participation/Quizzes	15%
Short Assignments	15%	Group Presentation	10%

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on this scale:

Minimum Grade	93.0	90.0	87.0	83.0	80.0	77.0	73.0	70.0	67.0	63.0	60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F

**Exams:** The exams will be closed-book, in-class examinations, consisting of an appropriate mixture of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. The midterm exam will cover topics covered up to that point in the course; per college policy, the final exam is *comprehensive*.

**In-Class Reading Quizzes:** A part of your participation and attendance grade will be based on your performance on these quizzes. Quizzes will begin *promptly* at the scheduled time for the class to begin. Your professor may decide to announce some quizzes in advance, but not all quizzes will be pre-announced. Students who regularly arrive late for class may not be permitted to take quizzes, at the discretion of the professor.

**Group Presentation:** Early in the semester, students will be assigned to a group of students who will work together on presenting the key idea(s) embodied in an assigned research article or chapter related to a particular topic on the syllabus. Each group should briefly meet with the professor *at least* a week before their assigned presentation date during his scheduled office hours (or make an appointment outside of those hours) to help prepare their presentation.

A recommended generic outline for the presentation will be provided early in the semester. The presentations *may not use any form of projection* (PowerPoint, overhead slides, etc.) or visual aids. Instead, I recommend that

each group use the generic outline as the basis for a brief, one-page handout that provides a summary of their assigned reading for the benefit of their fellow students and places it in the context of the broader course; this handout could also be used as an outline for their oral presentation to the class.

You should plan to speak for around 15–20 minutes; there will also be a question-and-answer period at the conclusion of each presentation.

**Discussion Papers:** Over the course of the semester, students will be expected to write several out-of-class essays based on the class readings. Each paper will be expected to be about two pages in length and will be a response to a question about one or more readings. For these papers, a separate title page is not required.

**Research Paper:** There will be a research paper of approximately 8–10 pages in length, including a proper title page; further details on the requirements for this paper assignment will be given in class and posted on Scholar later in the semester.

**General Paper Requirements:** Your papers must be individual efforts; you may consult with me, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

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.<sup>1</sup> The first page of your paper should include your name, the date, and an appropriate title for the assignment.

Papers must consistently use a widely-accepted citation style in the social and behavioral sciences; examples of acceptable styles include those included in the style manuals of the American Political Science Association (APSA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), the American Psychological Association (APA), or the Modern Language Association (MLA); “Chicago” or “Turabian” style is also acceptable (and is in fact similar to APSA style). All papers that make use of sources must include a list of works cited and include properly cited quotations or paraphrases of the material used. Papers should also be written in standard English with coherent use of prose and grammar.

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

**Class Discussion:** As this course is an upper-division class, students are expected to participate regularly in class discussions about the assigned readings. If you have other commitments that preclude regular class attendance, this portion of your grade will suffer and there are no “make-ups” for missed class discussions.

**Class Policies:** I make it a general policy to treat all students as adults. While this affords you, the student, greater freedom than you may have had in high school, it also means that you must take a greater personal responsibility for your performance in the course. 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 a homework 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 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.**

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

Make-up examinations must be scheduled two weeks in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly documented.

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.

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.

**Late Assignments:** A late penalty of up to 5 percentage points per day will apply to work turned in after the deadline for the assignment to be completed. Notwithstanding this policy, any work received more than 24 hours after the scheduled final examination may not be graded, resulting in a zero (0) on any assignments outstanding at that point in the semester. (Please refer to the college policy on incomplete grades, discussed below, for exceptions.)

**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. Please refer to the Student Handbook for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

**University and College Policies:** A grade of incomplete ("I") is assigned only to a student who is otherwise passing the class and only in cases of unavoidable or unforeseen circumstances (e.g., major illness) preventing a student from completing the course requirements. Verifiable documentary evidence is required.

Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation because of a disability (e.g., learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.) should make an appointment to see the professor during or outside of office hours; in general, accommodations will be made based on the written recommendations of the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (540-231-0858 or <http://www.ssd.vt.edu/>).

To maintain a fair and untainted learning environment for all students, there must be no cheating, plagiarism, or other dishonest conduct, as defined by Virginia Tech policy. Each of these terms is defined in the Virginia Tech Honor Code (<http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>). Each and every graded assignment shall include a statement personally signed by the student stating that the work was performed by the undersigned student. All course work must be completed solely by the individual student, unless specifically identified in writing as a group project by your professor. Any violations of the honor code will be fully reported. Recommendations regarding avoiding plagiarism and citing others' work are included in the course handout on plagiarism (posted in Scholar and on the professor's website).

**Withdrawal Deadlines:** The course drop deadline is Monday, February 27th. The deadline for resignation (dropping all courses) is Monday, March 19th. The last day to apply for a "W" grade is Friday, April 27th.

**Course Outline:** Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Scholar. We will not necessarily read books "front-to-back"; 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.

**Jan 18: Introduction** Introduction to the course; contrasting political institutions and political behavior.

Reading: Dalton, ch. 1.

- Jan 20, 23, 25: The Nature of Mass Beliefs** Where does public opinion come from? (How) does the mass public understand politics?  
Reading: Dalton, ch. 2.
- Jan 27, 30: The 2008 Presidential Contest** The context of the 2008 presidential election.  
Reading: Abramson et al., ch. 1–3.
- Feb 1, 3, 6: Forms of Political Participation** How does the public engage in politics? What forms of participation are common?  
Reading: Dalton, ch. 3.
- Feb 8, 10, 13: Who Participates?** Who are the voters? Who participates in other ways?  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 4; Abramson et al., ch. 4.
- Feb 15, 17: Values and Value Change** Underlying beliefs and values about politics and government.  
Reading: Dalton, ch. 5.
- Feb 20, 22, 24: Issues and Ideology** The relationship between issue positions and ideological orientations.  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 6.
- Feb 27, 29: Elections and Political Parties** Parties and party systems; realignment.  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 7.
- Mar 2** Midterm Exam
- Mar 5, 7, 9** No Class: Spring Break
- Mar 12, 14, 16: Social Forces and the Vote** Social group identity and voting in the U.S. and abroad.  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 8; Abramson et al., ch. 5.
- Mar 19, 21, 23: Party Identification** How partisan attachments affect voting.  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 9; Abramson et al., ch. 8.
- Mar 26, 28, 30: Attitudes, Issues, and the Vote** How issue positions affect voting behavior.  
Readings: Dalton, ch. 10; Abramson et al., ch. 6.
- Apr 2, 4, 6: Retrospective and Economic Voting** Does past performance guarantee future results?  
Reading: Abramson et al., ch. 7.
- Apr 9, 11, 13: The Nature of Representation** Collective versus dyadic correspondence; “responsible” parties?  
Reading: Dalton, ch. 11.
- Apr 16, 18, 20: Congressional Elections** The 2008 and 2010 elections to the House and Senate; contrast with presidential elections.  
Readings: Abramson et al., ch. 9–11.
- Apr 23, 25: Subnational elections** Elections to state and local office.  
Readings: TBD.
- Apr 27, 30: Conclusions** Citizens and democracy in America and elsewhere.  
Readings: Dalton et al., ch. 12; Abramson et al., ch. 12.
- May 2** Review for Final Exam.  
Final research paper due.
- Tuesday, May 8: Final Exam** 3:25–5:25 p.m., Torgersen 1020.