

POSC 807: American Political Behavior

Prof. Philip Edward Jones

pejones@udel.edu

Smith Hall 405

Course meetings: Tuesday, 2.00–5.00 in Smith Hall 348

Office hours: Thursday, 1.00–4.00

This graduate seminar provides an introduction to the vast literature on public opinion and political behavior in the United States. Major themes include the sources and structure of voters' attitudes and choices, the persuasive nature of elite communication, the impact of institutional and contextual influences, and the causes of unequal participation and engagement. Our primary focus will be on the U.S., the birthplace of political behavior research. Many of the readings include comparative elements that illuminate the core concepts and ideas in the field, however, and students are encouraged to explore how the U.S. literature translates to other political environments.

Required materials

- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. 1987/2010. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mendelberg, Tali. 2001. *The Race Card*. Princeton University Press
- Vavreck, Lynn. 2011. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press.
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

You are also required to have access to the course website on Sakai (<https://sakai.udel.edu/portal>), where additional readings are posted.

Your responsibilities

The course is a seminar, with discussion being the primary mode of learning. For you to get the most out of this class, you must come to every meeting having read the assigned texts and be ready to discuss them. You will probably want to bring the texts and your notes to class to aid your memory.

Each week, one student will lead discussion for the class, introducing their take on the readings and helping to structure our conversation. Over the course of the semester, each student will write six brief response papers analyzing and critiquing (*not* summarizing) the readings for particular weeks. These papers must be no longer than two pages, double-spaced, in 12pt font and with 1 inch margins. They must be emailed to me, preferably as a PDF, no later than 5pm on Sunday.

Students will produce an original research paper on some aspect of political behavior, whether American or comparative. This should take the form of the “front end” of a journal article: I expect to see a clear question, well-synthesized literature review, and clear and specific research design. You do not have to actually do the empirical research, although I encourage you to. To help develop your professional academic skills, you will produce a conference-style proposal for your paper (due Nov. 6th) and will give a conference-style presentation on it to the rest of the class. We will discuss all of these assignments in more detail throughout the semester.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

Response papers	20%
Class participation	25%
Discussion leadership	5%
Research paper	40%
Conference proposal	5%
Conference presentation	5%

Three notes about the course readings

First, I recommend that you read each week’s assigned readings in the order they are listed, since (for most weeks) the readings build on and respond to one another. Readings marked [S] are available for download on the Sakai course page. All other readings can be found via the library’s e-journals archive.

Second, note that the field of political behavior is largely quantitative in its research methods. We will encounter a wide range of methodologies, including experiments (survey and field), regression analysis of individual- and aggregate-level data, content analysis of campaign and media communication, and social network modeling. For those who want a non-technical refresher of the basics of regression analysis, I recommend pages 295–301 in *Voice and Equality*. If you want recommendations for further methods reading, see me.

Third, these readings provide only the smallest slice of the vast literature on American political behavior. I have added a field essay by Donald Kinder entitled “Pale Democracy: Opinion and Action in Postwar America” to the Sakai site. We will not be discussing his essay in class, but you may find it helpful to contextualize the assigned materials by reading his summary each week. I have annotated each week’s readings with the relevant page numbers.

Course schedule

Aug. 28: Organizational meeting

Sep. 4: Democratic expectations, democratic reality

[Kinder, p104–6]

- (1) Berelson, Bernard. 1952. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:313–330.
- (2) Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics". In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter. Free Press. [S]
- (3) Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Harper and Row. Chapter 11. [S]
- (4) Delli-Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*. Yale University Press. Chapter 4. [S]

Sep. 11: Voter competence

[Kinder, p106–11]

- (1) Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88:63–76.
- (2) Lodge, Milton, Marco R. Steenbergen and Shawn Brau. 1995. "The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and The Dynamics of Candidate Evaluation." *American Political Science Review* 89:309– 26.
- (3) Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press. Pages 28–39 and Chapter 4.
- (4) Converse, Philip E. 1990. "Popular Representation and the Distribution of Information". In *Information and Democratic Preferences*, ed. John A. Ferejohn and James H. Kuklinski. University of Illinois Press. [S]
- (5) Althaus, Scott L. 1998. "Information Effects in Collective Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 92(3):545–558.

Sep. 18: Political participation

[Kinder, p126–9]

- (1) Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press. Chapters 2-3, 9-14, 16-17.
- (2) Jennings, M. Kent. 1997. "Political Participation in the Chinese Countryside." *American Political Science Review* 91(2):361–372.

Sep. 25: Voter turnout

[Kinder, p129–31]

- (1) Powell, G. Bingham. 1986. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 80:17–43.
- (2) Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan. Chapters 6-7. [S]
- (3) Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102(1):33–48.
- (4) McDonald, Michael P., and Samuel L. Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter." *American Political Science Review* 95(4): 963-974.

Oct. 2: Social groups and political principles

[Kinder, p113–6]

- (1) Chong, Dennis. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties." *American Journal of Political Science* 37:867–99.
- (2) Mendelberg, Tali. 2001. *The Race Card*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1, 4-8, 10.

Oct. 9: Economic models

[Kinder, p112]

- (1) Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 1. [S]
- (2) Anderson, Christopher J. 2000. "Economic Voting and Political Context: A Comparative Perspective." *Electoral Studies* 19(2-3):151–170.
- (3) MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson and James A. Stimson. 1992. "Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate and the U.S. Economy." *American Political Science Review* 86:598–611.
- (4) Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Harper and Row. Chapters 2–3. [S]
- (5) Sears, David O. and Carolyn L. Funk. 1990. "Self-Interest in Americans' Political Opinions". In *Beyond Self-Interest*, ed. Jane J. Mansbridge. University of Chicago Press. [S]

Oct. 16: Party identification

[Kinder, p133–5]

- (1) Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6. [S]
- (2) MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson and James A. Stimson. 1989. "Macropartisanship." *American Political Science Review* 83(4):1125–1142.
- (3) Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. Yale University Press. Chapter 2. [S]
- (4) Jerit, Jennifer and Jason Barabas. 2012. "Partisan Perceptual Bias and the Information Environment." *Journal of Politics* 74(3):672–684.
- (5) Lupu, Noam. Forthcoming. "Party Brands and Partisanship: Theory with Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Argentina." *American Journal of Political Science*. Available here: http://www.noamlupu.com/brands_experiments.pdf

Oct. 23: Affect and genetics

- (1) Valentino, Nicholas A., Ted Brader, Eric W. Groenendyk, Krysha Gregorowicz and Vincent L. Hutchings. 2011. "Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation." *Journal of Politics* 73(1):156–170.
- (2) MacKuen, Michael, Jennifer Wolak, Luke Keele and George E. Marcus. 2010. "Civic Engagements: Resolute Partisanship or Reflective Deliberation." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2):440– 458.
- (3) Alford, John R., Carolyn L. Funk and John R. Hibbing. 2005. "Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?" *American Political Science Review* 99(2):153–167.
- (4) Beckwith, Jon and Corey A. Morris. 2008. "Twin Studies of Political Behavior: Untenable Assumptions?" *Perspectives on Politics* 6(4):785–791.
- (5) Alford, John R., Carolyn L. Funk and John R. Hibbing. 2008. "Twin Studies, Molecular Genetics, Politics, and Tolerance: A Response to Beckwith and Morris." *Perspectives on Politics* 6(4):793– 797.

Oct. 30: Voters in context

- (1) Oliver, J. Eric and Tali Mendelberg. 2000. "Reconsidering the Environmental Determinants of White Racial Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(3):574–589.
- (2) Gay, Claudine. 2004. "Putting Race in Context: Identifying the Environmental Determinants of Black Racial Attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 98(4):547–562.
- (3) Huckfeldt, Robert and John Sprague. 1987. "Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political Information." *American Political Science Review* 81(4):1197–1216.
- (4) Mondak, Jeffery J., Diana C. Mutz and Robert Huckfeldt. 1996. "Persuasion in Context: The Multilevel Structure of Economic Evaluations." In *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*, ed. Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman and Richard A. Brody. University of Michigan Press. [S]
- (5) Berger, Jonah, Marc Meredith and S. Christian Wheeler. 2008. "Contextual priming: Where people vote affects how they vote." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105(26):8846–8849.

Nov. 6: No class – Election Day

Conference proposals due at 5pm via email

Nov. 13: Persuasion and information flows

[Kinder, p121–6]

- (1) Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1–3, 5-10.
- (2) Zaller, John. 1996. "The Myth of a Massive Media Impact Revived: New Support for a Discredited Idea." In Mutz, Sniderman and Brody, *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. [S]

Nov. 20: Campaign effects

- (1) Stevenson, Randolph T. and Lynn Vavreck. 2000. "Does Campaign Length Matter? Testing for Cross-National Effects." *British Journal of Political Science* 30(2):217–235.
- (2) Vavreck, Lynn. 2011. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press.

Nov. 27: Media effects

[Kinder, p117–121]

- (1) Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. 1987/2010. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. University of Chicago Press.

Dec. 4: Student presentations