

GOV 2050
Public Opinion and Voting
 Spring 2023

MW 10:05-11:30am Druckenmiller 004
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Instructor: Michael Franz Email: mfranz@bowdoin.edu Phone: 207-798-4318 (office) Office: 200 Hubbard Hall	<u>Office Hours:</u> Tuesday, 9-11am Thursday, 2-3pm Book an appointment in Blackboard; Or email about a different time as needed
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This course considers political behavior in American politics. We consider four major ideas. **First**, what is political participation? Is voting sufficient for good citizenship? What else constitutes political action, and what does not? **Next**, we examine the reasons why citizens do or do not participate in various forms. Why are Americans less active in politics today than in years past? How does the socioeconomic status of Americans, as well as their race, ethnicity, and gender, explain differences in rates of political participation? **Third**, we consider the role of the media and our broader information environment in explaining variations in political behavior. Beyond just differences across Americans in class, race, ethnicity, and gender, how do our experiences as citizens and consumers influence our levels of political activity? **Finally**, we investigate the normative implications of participation in various forms. What if everyone voted? How can we increase turnout rates? Is more participation always better than less? The major goal of this course is to provide an overview of the important debates in American politics about the reasons for and implications of political participation in various forms.

Learning Goals

At the end of this course students should be able to:

	The following parts of the course will address this outcome
Explain variations in turnout across American history and discuss common reasons why some people do and do not vote.	Part 1 (What is political participation?)
Discuss forms of political participation beyond voting, as well as the way that these forms of political behavior differ from each other.	Parts 1, 2, and 4
Discuss the role of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in explaining rates of participation.	Part 2, along with the final project
Understand how our experiences as citizens and consumers explain rates of political participation.	Part 3
Evaluate the scientific methods of researching/studying political behavior.	Throughout the course, along with the final project

Course Requirements

There are 6 major components to your grade:

1. **Four reading reactions** (8 points; each worth 2 points)—these are short reactions of about 2 pages (double-spaced). I will evaluate these based on how well you react to the readings (namely, originality of thought and conciseness). There are no right or wrong answers, but I will challenge you to think logically. These papers are due **by the start of class** on Monday or Wednesday, and they should focus on the readings for that day. Because there are only four of them, you can choose when to complete them. **To hand in a reaction paper, see the “Assignments” link on the left-side menu of our Canvas page. I will grade and return the papers to you via Canvas.** You can only do one reaction paper per class. So plan ahead!
2. **Participation** (8 points)—this includes attendance and class participation. Attendance is required, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. Be advised, simple attendance is not sufficient; I will also evaluate participation from your comments in class, and I urge you to ask questions in lecture or express your opinion.
3. **Weekly Quizzes** (10 points)—there is a possibility of a quiz on any class day that will deal with the readings for that specific day. It will consist of 2-3 very short questions on the readings. There are no make-ups for missed quizzes. If you miss a quiz for an excused absence, I will exempt you from the quiz on that day.
4. **Midterm Exam** (30 points) — due by *Thursday, March 9th*. You can complete the exam at any time between Monday 3/6 (after 2pm) and Thursday 3/9 (by midnight). The exam is open book and open note. The format will be short answers and essays, and both will be derived from readings and lectures. The exam will be posted to Canvas, and you will have a specific time (two hours) and page limit (seven total pages—double spaced, 12-point font).
 - *The seven-page limit will be strictly enforced. I will not read past Page 7.
 - **You are NOT allowed to work with another student on the exam. ANY evidence of collaboration is grounds for failure of the class.
5. **Final Exam** (30 points) — a take home exam that is NOT cumulative; it is on the lectures and readings for all classes after the mid-term. The parameters of the exam are the same as the mid-term. The exam will be available on May 15th, and you will have until *Tuesday, May 16th* (by midnight) to access and complete it.
6. **Class Project and Presentation** (14 points)—See the details at the end of the syllabus. The project will involve independent work and a small group component.

Readings

There are four books for this course and several outside articles. All the outside readings are accessible through Blackboard.

1. Elizabeth Theiss-Morse and Michael Wagner. 2023. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. 15th Edition. Sage.
2. Kay Lehman Schlozman Henry E. Brady Sidney Verba. 2020. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press.
3. Ethan Porter. 2021. *The Consumer Citizen*. Oxford University Press.
4. Eitan Hersh. 2020. *Politics Is for Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change*. Scribner.

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at: <https://www.bowdoin.edu/dean-of-students/student-handbook/the-academic-honor-code-and-social-code.html>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult a reference librarian or me.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class. This means completing all reading reactions, the final paper/project, and both exams.
3. Cite your sources in submitted reaction papers. Talk with me about proper citation if you have any questions. I'm open to any approach you take, so long as it is consistent and generally well-regarded. Consider [the Chicago Style](#), as I'm partial to that one.
4. I am fine if students want to use laptops during class time. I strongly recommend, however, that you resist using your laptop for checking email or sending/reading messages.

Part 1—What is Political Participation?

Week 1

January 23— Introductions and Expectations

January 25—A Primer on Political Participation

- Theiss-Morse and Wagner [TMW], Chapter 1

Week 2

January 30—Turnout and Voting, Part 1

- TMW, Chapter 2

February 1—Turnout and Voting, Part 2

- TMW, Chapter 3

Week 3

February 6—Political Participation and Inequality

- TMW, Chapter 4
- Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, Sidney Verba, [SBV], Chapters 1-2

Part 2—What Explains Political (Non)Participation?

February 8—The Civic Voluntarism Model

- SBV, Chapter 3

Week 4

February 13—Partisanship

- TMW, Chapter 5

February 15— Ideology

- TMW, Chapter 6, pp.169-196

Week 5

February 20— Ideology, cont.

- TMW, Chapter 6, pp.196-214

February 22—Unequal Political Voice

[No lecture on this day, but meet your group and touch base]

- SBV, Chapters 4-6
- *Initial data analysis/testing*

Week 6

February 27—Unequal Political Voice, cont.

- SBV, Chapters 7-11

March 1—Unequal Political Voice, cont.

- SBV, Chapters 10-11

Week 7

March 6—A Digression: An Audit of Political Behavior Research

- Joshua Robison et al, “An Audit of Political Behavior Research,” SAGE Open

March 8—Midterm Exam

Weeks 8 and 9

March 13 - 24—Spring Break!

Week 10

March 27— Unequal Political Voice, cont.

- SBV, Chapters 12-13

March 29— Campaign Effects

- TMW, Chapter 7

Week 11

April 3— Campaign Effects, cont.

- TMW, Chapter 8

April 5— Campaign Effects, cont.

- Pablo Barberá, Andreu Casas, Jonathan Nagler, Patrick J. Egan, Richard Bonneau, John T. Jost And Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. “Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting By Legislators And The Mass Public Using Social Media Data,” *American Political Science Review*. 113(4): 883-901.

Week 12

Part 3—What is the Impact of Media and our Experience(s) as Citizens and Consumers?

April 10— Partisanship and Media

- James Druckman, Matthew Levendusky, and Audrey McLain. 2017. “No Need to Watch: How the Effects of Partisan Media Can Spread via Interpersonal Discussions,” *American Journal of Political Science*, pp.1-14.
- Erik Peterson. 2017. “The Role of the Information Environment in Partisan Voting,” *The Journal of Politics*. 79(4).

April 12— Partisanship and Identity

- Alexander Theodoridis. 2017. “Me, Myself, and (I), (D), or (R)? Partisanship and Political Cognition through the Lens of Implicit Identity,” *The Journal of Politics*. 79(4).
- John Holbein. 2017. “Childhood Skill Development and Adult Political Participation,” *American Political Science Review*.

Week 13

April 17— Consumers and Politics

- Porter, Chapters 1-3

April 19— Consumers and Politics, cont.

- Porter, Chapters 4-6

Videos due by April 21

Week 14

April 24— Group Presentations

April 26— Group Presentations

Week 15

Part 4—What are the Implications?

May 1—Can We Improve Turnout?

- Ihaab Syed, “How Much Electoral Participation Does Democracy Require? The Case for Minimum Turnout Requirements in Candidate Elections,” *UCLA Law Review*
- Jennifer Hochschild. 2010. “If Democracies Need Informed Voters, How Can They Thrive While Expanding Enfranchisement?” *Election Law Journal*. 9(2): 111-123.

May 3—Addressing Polarization

- Mia Costa. 2021. “Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want from Political Representation,” *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Erik Peterson and Maxwell Allamong. 2021. “The Influence of Unknown Media on Public Opinion: Evidence from Local and Foreign News Sources,” *American Political Science Review*.

Week 16

May 8—Considering Political Hobbyism

- Hersh, pp.1-83

May 10— Considering Political Hobbyism, cont.

- Hersh, pp.85-144

Final Project

The goal of this project is three-fold:

1. To allow you to use up to two inter-faces that archive survey data on American political behavior and attitudes.
2. To collect data on the relationship between race, gender, class, or party ID on different measures of political behavior and attitudes.
3. To work with a small group to produce a video overview of the results that will be shared with the class.

You will be assigned to a group of about four students. Each student in the group will be assigned the same survey question but a different respondent feature (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, party identification). **First**, you will use either American National Election study or the General Social Survey (depending on the question) to locate the trend (over years or elections) in responses split by your assigned respondent feature. You will use an online interface to download the survey responses. Links to the interfaces are on the course’s Blackboard page. (I will provide a few tutorials later in the semester that walk through how to produce data tabulations from these interfaces.) **Second**, you will also investigate intersectionality for a second survey question of your own choosing, either in the same interface or a different one. With the results, you will meet as a group and discuss the results. Then you will organize a presentation about the results (about 15 minutes), which you will record and share with the class. The video is due by April 21. (My recommendation is to record the presentation as a Zoom meeting of the

group, which can then be uploaded to Bowdoin's server and shared as a link. We will discuss this in more detail later in the semester.) We will watch these presentations before the designated class sessions (April 24 and 26), and during class we will discuss the results. We will focus on about four presentations in each class. Students in each group will answer any questions from classmates and from Professor Franz.

- Respondent features/characteristics:
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Income/class (SES)
 - Party identification

From NES: 1948 to 2016; and 2020

- Year: **VCF0004** (1948 to 2016)
- Race: **VCF0105B** (1948 to 2016); **V201549x** (2020)
- Gender: **VCF0104** (1948 to 2016); **V201600** (2020)
- Party: **VCF0301** (1952 to 2016); **V201231x** (2020)
- Income: **VCF0114** (1948 to 2016); **V202468x** (2020)
[Income and not percentile in 2020]

From GSS: 1972-2021

- Year: **year** (1973 to 2021)
- Race*: **race** (1972-2018)
- Gender: **sex** (1972-2021) [male/female only]
- Party: **partyid** (1972-2021)

*For race, the GSS splits respondents into white, black, and other. There is a more detailed set of codes for Hispanic respondents that solicits their self-identified group (i.e., Cuban or Mexican).

- Topics will include:

From NES:

Trust in government: **VCF0604** (1958 to 2012); **V201233** (2020)

External efficacy: **VCF0648** (1958 to 2016); no 2020 data

Government services spending scale: **VCF0839** (1982 to 2016); **V201246** (2020)

“Is religion important to respondent?” **VCF0846** (1980 to 2016); **V201433** (2020) [Question options changed in 2020]

“We have gone too far pushing equal rights” **VCF9014** (1984 to 2012); no 2020 data

Approve/disapprove U.S. Congress: **VCF0992** (1980 to 2016); **V201124** (2020)

Did anyone talk to you about registering to vote or getting out to vote? **VCF9021** (1984 to 2016); **V202008** (2020)

From GSS:

Spending too much money on improving nation's education system: **nateduc** (1973 to 2021)

Confidence in Supreme Court: **conjudge** (1973 to 2021)

Possible for a woman to obtain a legal abortion for any reason? **abany** (1977 to 2021)

Should marijuana be legal? **grass** (1973 to 2018)

- Some important considerations:
 - A third database is the 2016 and 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. These are also linked on our Blackboard page. I encourage you to look at those interfaces for the intersectionality component of the assignment. The number of survey respondents is a lot larger in these surveys, but the survey has a much smaller time horizon: 2016 and 2018. Pick a survey question in 2016, 2018, or in both, and run a data tabulation on the two respondent features assigned to your group. Investigate the pattern of results.
 - You are not a survey expert. But pay attention to question wording for the questions you investigate. Would you expect different results with more or fewer response options?

- How will you be graded?
 - You will be graded as a group based on the clarity of the presentation and the ability to answer questions about the results from Professor Franz and your classmates. What are the major patterns in your results? What did the group learn about the impact of race, class, gender, or party identification on the distribution of opinions and attitudes that your group investigated?
 - I reserve the right to grade each student lower than their group if they demonstrated a lack of commitment to the project. Please speak with me if you have concerns about the effort of a group member.
 - You must submit to Professor Franz a copy of the slides you project during your presentation. This will most likely be a PowerPoint file that you can email to Professor Franz.