1 Course Description

Politics affect many aspects of our every day lives, whether we are aware of it or not. How we notice or respond to these politics depends on a wide variety of factors — from how knowledgeable you are about politics to your personality. This class focuses on how average citizens respond to politics in their everyday lives. Specifically, the class addresses answers to the questions what affects political behavior and how are political attitudes formed?

This class surveys the vast literature that explores political behavior and formation of political attitudes. The primary focus is on the political behavior of non-elite actors in the American context. We begin with the basic question of how informed the electorate is, and how that might affect their decision-making. We then turn to one of the most discussed expressions of political behavior, voting. We investigate how voter and candidate characteristics and institutional features shape voting behavior. Next, we analyze how political attitudes are formed and disseminated, specifically paying attention to attitudes on race. Finally, we examine other avenues through which one expresses political attitudes including social media, protesting, and contacting elected officials. Throughout the class, we will pay particular attention to how behavior and attitude formation are measured as the literature in this class draws on methodologies from many fields including psychology, sociology, and computational linguistics.

Students taking the class will be expected to participate in class discussions of the assigned readings as well as the opportunity to develop a research proposal that analyzes political behavior of a subject of their choosing.

2 Class Policies

Classroom Etiquette:
I expect that all students will read the entirety of the assigned readings in preparation for that days class. While class will be a combination of both lectures and discussion, there will be more gained if everyone comes to class prepared. In addition, I ask that all electronic devices be used solely for the purposes of referencing papers or taking notes. Facebook, e-mail, and phones should be ignored throughout the class so that full attention can be given to the material at hand. If class participation becomes problematic, I may request the use of no electronic devices during class time.
**Academic Integrity and honor code:**
Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated in any form. If you are uncertain what constitutes plagiarism, please ask. All quotations, data, and ideas taken from other work must be cited. There are serious consequences for intellectual theft as USC students (and in real life, Google: John Walsh, Montana). Please see [www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tig.pdf](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tig.pdf) for more information about what plagiarism is, and how to prevent cheating in your own work.

Students should understand that they will not give or receive aid in examinations and that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.

**Absences and Late Assignments:**
Do not skip class, and do not ask for an extension the day an assignment is due. If a conflict is expected, please notify me one week in advance so that we can form a plan of action. Sometimes unexpected absences and other life events happen that require a last minute change in plans. Please alert me to these as soon as possible.

**Academic Accommodations:**
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### 3 Assignments

A full description and grading rubric for the main assignments will be distributed during the quarter. If you have any questions about an assignment, or questions about class content in general, please make an appointment for office hours on [wejoinin.com/tabitha](http://wejoinin.com/tabitha).

While this class is a lecture class, we will have many opportunities for discussion in this class. The bulk of your grade will therefore be based on your in-class participation. There will also be a final paper, with several mid-term milestones to aid in both learning through the assignment as well in efficient work on the project. Finally there will be two in-class examinations during the term to measure understanding of course content.

**In-class Participation:**
Each day there will be opportunity for discussion. If you have read the class material, you should be able to answer my questions or have developed questions of your own. Alternatively, there are other methods to contribute to class:

- bring a news or academic article, poll, or news story that is relevant to the topic at hand;
- create an outline or summary to recall points during the discussion;
- make a summary observation that touches on a recurring theme in our discussion or links back to previous discussions; or
- ask a relevant question about the paper you read, about someone’s comment, or about the class discussion as a whole.
In addition, students will be able to participate in group discussions and debates throughout the quarter. For each, I will distribute the particular assignment in the lecture before the activity. There will be some, but minimal preparation before the activities. Finally, each student will be expected to take the lead on introducing two papers throughout the quarter. Taking the lead means giving a summary of the paper. If the student chooses, the student can have a question or two prepared to ask the class.

**Exams:**
There will be two in-class examinations throughout the term. The content will be announced about 1 week in advance of each exam. The exams will be open note, but will be timed. The exams will be given electronically, so expect to bring a computer on exam days. If that is not possible, please talk to me in advance.

**Class Project:**
The class project will be to select an aspect of American political behavior, discuss the research on it, and one paper in particular. Finally, students will be asked to design a research proposal of their own to further investigate that project. Students will be asked to post and comment on other’s work in three milestones throughout the course. More detailed descriptions will be given for each milestone. However, rough outlines of the project are as follows:

- **Milestone 1:** In 3-4 pages (double-spaced), select an expression of American political behavior or attitudes for your project. Discuss why this is an interesting topic, and what a potential research question will be. Include also at least 4 academic works on that topic that will help you begin your research.

- **Milestone 2:** For your next installment, construct a brief, critical review of the articles or books that you selected on your question. Has any one looked at this question before? What have they discovered? What holes do they have in their work? (Approximately 5-6 pages double-spaced.)

- **Milestone 3:** In 4-5 pages (double-spaced) explain how this topic could be further explored. Has measurement of the dependent variable been faulty? Then what might you do to improve it? Has no one measured this idea before? Why not? And how could you potentially measure it? Has the extant research not controlled for or moderated on a specific variable? What difference would that make?

- **Presentation:** Present a summary of your project, your question, the extant literature, and your proposal to the class. Each student will have a strict 5 minutes to review their work and about 3 minutes for questions.

- **Final Paper:** The students should aggregate their work from their milestones into a single paper that also includes an introduction and conclusion to the topic at hand. The paper should reflect both instructor and peer comments made throughout the quarter, and should also consider strengths and weaknesses of your approach. The final paper should be no more than 16 pages, double spaced.

The specific breakdown of the weight of each assignment is as follows:

- **Class Participation:** 40%
  - General participation: 10%
  - Group exercise participation: 20% (5% each)
Paper Discussion Lead: 10% (5% each)

- Exams: 20% (10% each)
- Class Project: 40%
  - Proposal Check-in 1: 5%
  - Proposal Check-in 2: 5%
  - Proposal Check-in 3: 5%
  - Final Presentation: 5%
  - Final Paper 20%

4 Required readings and schedule

*Required texts:*
There are is one book required for this class: Delli Carpini and Keeter. 1993. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters.*

There will be a course reader to pick up from the bookstore. There is approximately one article assigned to each class. All readings should be read in advance of the class on the day which it is assigned. Unless otherwise indicated, assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class.

*Note: This schedule is subject to change.*
Introduction: What is political behavior? Why and how do study it?

Mon., Jan. 12: Introduction to course, expectations, content, and each other.  
   *No Reading.*

   **Unit 1: Political Behavior and Participation in Democracy**

   Wed., Jan. 14: **What does participation in American democracy require?**  

   Fri., Jan. 16: **Do citizens have the information they need to participate in politics?**  
   Delli Carpini and Keeter. 1993., Chapters 2 and 6

   Mon., Jan. 19: **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.**  
   *No class.*


   Fri., Jan. 23: **Do heuristics work?**  

   Mon., Jan. 26: **Group exercise**  
   Please review notes and readings form this unit; Also, read: Boudreau and Lupia, “Political Knowledge.” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia (eds.) Cambridge University Press, 2011. or Delli Carpini and Keeter. 1993., Appendix 3.

   **Unit 2: The Formation of Political Attitudes**

   Wed., Jan. 28: **How do we measure political behavior and attitudes?**  

   Fri., Jan. 30: **Political Attitudes: From Ideas to Survey Responses**  

   Mon., Feb. 2: **The Impact of Attitudes on Democracy**  
Unit 3: What shapes voting behavior?

Wed., Feb. 4:  **Americans and Voting Behavior**  

Part A: Issues and Transmission

Fri., Feb. 6:  **Candidate Positioning and Ambiguity**  

Mon., Feb. 9:  **Voter Uncertainty**  

Wed., Feb. 11:  **Importance of Policy Issues**  

Fri., Feb. 13:  **Present Milestone 1, Proposal, in Groups.**  
*Milestone 1 Due.*

Mon., Feb. 16:  **President’s Day**  
*No class.*

Wed., Feb. 18:  **Exam 1**

Part B: Voter Characteristics

Fri., Feb. 20:  **Voter Demographics**  
Delli Carpini and Keeter. 1993., Chapter 4.

Mon., Feb. 23:  

Wed., Feb. 25:  **Partisanship**  

Part C: Candidate Characteristics

Fri., Feb. 27:  **Impacts of Candidate Race, Gender, and Appearance**  
TBA

Wed., Mar 4: **Group exercise: Polarization**

Fri., Mar. 6: **Milestone 2: Literature Review**
Milestone 2 Due.

**Part D: Institutional Features**

Mon., Mar 9: **Suffrage**

Wed., Mar 11: **Voter Identification Laws and Turn out**


Mon., Mar 16: *No class.*
Wed., Mar 18: *No class.*
Fri., Mar 20: *No class.*

Mon., Mar 23: **What influences turnout?**

**Unit 4: Political attitudes and their impact on policy: The case of racism**

Wed., Mar 25: **Racism**


Mon., Mar. 30: **Group exercise: How do we measure racism?**
Milestone 3 Due.

Fri., Apr. 3: Exam 2

Unit 5: How are political attitudes formed?

Mon., Apr. 6: The Media

The Quarterly Journal of Economics Vol. 122, No. 3.

Fri., Apr. 10: Socialization or Policy Preference Correspondence?

Mon., Apr. 13: Genetics?
Public Research Quarterly Vol. 62, No. 3.

Wed., Apr. 15: Group Exercise: Personality in Politics

Unit 6: Other types of political behavior

Fri., Apr. 17: Social Media and Political Discourse
Guest lecturer, Reading TBA.

Mon., Apr. 20: Political discourse

Wed., Apr. 22: Political activism: Who is active?

Fri., Apr. 24: Who gets response?

Mon., Apr. 27: Project Presentation
Wed., Apr. 29: Project Presentation
Fri., May 1: Course Conclusion
Final Project Due