Political Science 821: Mass Political Behavior

Barry C. Burden
University of Wisconsin
Spring Semester 2015
Tuesdays 1:20-3:15pm
55 Bascom Hall

Email: bcburden@wisc.edu
Office hours: Mondays 10-11:30am and by appointment

This graduate seminar provides an examination of mass political behavior in the United States, with an emphasis on political participation, elections, and voting behavior. The goal is survey what the best and most visible scholarship has to say about why the American electorate behaves as it does. The syllabus mostly excludes work that is focused squarely on public opinion, political communication, and political psychology because those topics are addressed in other courses. The readings emphasize topics that are of interest to researchers today, so the material tends to be contemporary rather than classic.

Responsibilities

I expect that students will do all of the required reading and come to class prepared to discuss it in a thoughtful fashion. The number of pages required each week is kept at manageable level. Careful reading and participation in class discussion are the keys to making the class productive for everyone involved. You might not immediately understand everything in the readings. In particular, the methodologies deployed in the readings will be difficult to grasp if you have not yet taken courses in research design and advanced statistics. That is fine. I ask that you give it a serious try and then bring your insights as well as your questions to class.

Each student will write four reaction papers during the semester. These should be uploaded to the Learn@UW site by Monday at 4pm for each of the four weeks you select. The papers should assess, critique, and synthesize that week’s readings. Each paper should be no longer than three double-spaced pages. Reaction papers and class participation together comprise half of the final grade. You should be prepared to discuss the materials covered in each class, whether or not you wrote a reaction paper for that session.

A final article-length research paper, which must include original analysis, will also be worth half of the final grade. In most cases the papers will rely on secondary data such as the ANES, CCES, or aggregate election results. Be aware of the IRB requirements if you decide to collect original data. A prospectus for the paper of about two pages should be uploaded to Learn@UW by Friday, April 17 at 4pm. I will give you quick feedback on the prospectus. The final paper is due in hard copy on Friday, May 15 at 4pm. With my permission you may co-author the paper with a fellow student. During the final class session each student will briefly present findings both to get verbal feedback from the class and to gain experience presenting original research.
Readings

Most of the course readings are from recent journal articles. They will be posted to Learn@UW. One book is required: Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s *Voice and Equality*. It is on reserve at the library and should be purchased if possible. You might also decide to purchase other books even if the assigned chapters are posted online.

Other Considerations

Your success in this class is important to me. All students are strongly encouraged to visit office hours if only to introduce yourself and let me know how the course is working for you.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact me early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

If you must miss class due to illness or another valid, unavoidable conflict, please contact me in advance.

I reserve the right to modify the syllabus timeline or specific readings as needed.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. I will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the appropriate dean’s office.

Please only use electronic devices in class for referencing course materials, taking notes, and occasionally tracking down online items that are necessary for our discussions. Everything else should be quieted and stowed away for later use.
January 20: Introduction

January 27: Voting as a Form of Participation

Required
1. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady. *Voice and Equality*. (chapters 2, 3, 7-14, & 16)

Recommended

February 3: Voter Turnout

Required

Recommended

February 10: Vote Choice

Required

**Recommended**


**February 17: Party Identification**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 24: Polarization**

**Required**


**Recommended**

March 3: Interests and Choices

Required

Recommended

March 10: Economics and Policy

Required

Recommended
March 17: Political Information

Required

Recommended

March 24: Social Networks

Required

Recommended

March 31: Spring Recess
April 7: Campaign Effects

Required

Recommended

April 14: Media Influence

Required

Recommended

April 17: Prospectus Due

April 21: Congressional Elections

Required

**Recommended**


**April 28: Election Administration**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 5: Student Presentations**

**May 15: Paper Due**