

POLS 5311 – Seminar in American Government

Instructor: Lucas Lothamer

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Time: Tuesday 6-850p

Location: Arts and Sciences 216

Office Hours: T/Th 330-5p and by appointment (CAS 123)

Course Description

This course is a graduate seminar examining select readings in American politics. Discussions will focus on topics such as the founding, separation of powers, the three branches of government, public opinion, partisanship and party polarization, political behavior, and campaigns and their effect on the electorate. This course is one of the required core courses for the graduate program in political science and is intended to provide students with a wholistic view of the many subfields within American politics.

Seminar Class

As this is a graduate course it will be led as a seminar and not a lecture. In this format students take a lead role in each class discussing the assigned readings, the significance of their findings, the strengths/weaknesses of the readings, and the implications of the readings to our understanding of politics. As such, students will need to complete all assigned readings before each class and come prepared to discuss them.

Communication

I am always available to chat and happy to meet with students. If you ever need to chat you can either stop by during office hours or email me to make an appointment (either in office or online). You can also email me with any questions or concerns. When emailing, please allow 24 hours for a response (emails over weekends may not be responded to till Monday).

Be sure to only email me using your student email account. Due to FERPA, I will not be able to respond with course information to personal email accounts.

Assignments

Participation – 30%

Reflection papers – 30%

Final Project – 40%

- Topic Idea (5%)
- Part 1 - Theory (10%)
- Final Paper (20%)
- Class presentation (5%)

Participation

The expectation for all students is to do the assigned readings **before** each class, give them thoughtful consideration, and come to each class prepared to discuss these readings. Students will be expected to answer questions about the purpose of each paper, their strengths and weaknesses, unanswered questions from each paper, and their own assessments of each reading. Attendance alone is not enough to do well in this category. Rather, each student must actively contribute to class discussion.

If a student has no choice but to miss a class due to an extenuating circumstance the student will need to contact the professor as soon as possible to explain the reason for the absence. Absences must be considered an approved absence per UT Tyler guidelines. Any student who misses more than 25% of the class for any reason will be ineligible to continue in the class and receive a passing score.

Reflection Papers

Students will need to write at least four 2-3 page reflection papers over a week's reading and submit them before class. These are not summary papers and should do more than simply summarize and restate what is in the readings. Rather, these papers should synthesize the main argument and findings of the assigned readings. Students may make connections between the readings for the week, expand on the implications of the readings, contemplate on what questions further work may seek to answer, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the readings, etc. The reflection papers should provide evidence students not only read over the assigned readings but meaningfully thought about their findings, what they did, and what it means for our knowledge of American politics.

Final Project

The final project will be focused on students developing a paper proposal that will seek to test a theory students have about American politics. The purpose of this project is to prepare students for their final project. This will be evaluated in four different components listed below:

Topic (5%)

Students will need to begin thinking about a broad, overarching topic they would like to study regarding American politics. This could be anything from how the institutions of government change/function, the relationship between institutions, bureaucracies, campaigns and elections, public opinion, political behavior, etc. The topic should be somewhat narrowed down so that it provides a starting point for you to think about your theory. An example of a good topic might be "I want to study attitude formation in the American public and how attitudes motivate political behavior." This is broad but serves as a good starting point to narrow down to an idea for the motivating theory of the overall paper.

Part 1 - Theory (10%)

Students will read over the literature and develop and submit a rough draft of a motivating theory for their project. The theory should be devised from an overarching question the student has about American politics. In our weekly readings we will go over each reading's literature review and discuss the motivating theory for each article we read. Students should attempt to emulate this in their own literature review.

Final Paper (20%)

Students will need to submit a completed research paper with a full literature review outlining their motivating theory/purpose of the study, the data they will need to have/plan on collecting in order to address their theory, their plan for analysis, what the significant and null results will mean, and the overall implications of the study. I do not expect students to gather data and analyze it in the short time of our class. However, I do expect students to write out a plan of where they would get the data and how they could analyze it. More instructions on formatting, style, and preparation will be provided in class.

Class Presentation (5%)

Each student will prepare a ten-minute presentation of their research proposal where they highlight their motivating theory/research question, go over where/how they will obtain their data, explain their plan for analysis, and discuss the implications of their work.

Letter Grades

Final letter grades for this class will be awarded as shown below:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

I will round up to the nearest decimal point using .5 as the cutoff. This means students ending with an 89.5 will be rounded up to a 90. I will not make any exceptions to this policy.

Disability Services

I will abide by all accommodations approved by the university to ensure fair accessibility. It is the student's responsibility to meet with the instructor and inform them of the necessary accommodation on or around the first day of class. Do not wait to do so right before an exam!

To apply for services please follow the link below:

<https://www.utt Tyler.edu/academics/success-services/disability-services/>

Title IX Reporting

The University of Texas at Tyler is committed to the principle that the university's learning and working environment be free from inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment in any form will not be tolerated and individuals who engage in such conduct will be subjected to

disciplinary action, whether on or off campus. I will report any and all behavior that fits the definition of sexual harassment to the appropriate office.

On-Campus Food Pantry

The Patriot Pantry is dedicated to helping students, staff, faculty and community members in need. Its mission is to provide food and personal care items to members of the UT Tyler community. Our pantry is completely donor funded, and it is our goal that no student goes to class hungry! For more information please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/service-learning/food-pantry/>

Student Counseling

Ut Tyler provides in-person and online counseling services to students. For more information please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/student-life/health-wellness/student-counseling-center/>

Students Rights and Responsibilities

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: <http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php> (Links to an external site.)

Artificial Intelligence Policy

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI is not permitted in this course at all. I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

Course Schedule

The following is the planned schedule for the semester. While I do not foresee any changes to this, I reserve the right to make necessary changes to the syllabus in order to accommodate unforeseen events, due to the pace of the course or to preserve academic integrity.

1/13 – Go over syllabus/introduction of course

Optional readings on how to read academic articles efficiently and effectively (in Canvas)

1/20 – Public Opinion and Ideology: Do People Hold Meaningful Attitudes?

Readings

- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.
- Freder, Sean, Gabriel S. Lenz, and Shad Turney. 2019. "The Importance of Knowing 'What Goes with What': Reinterpreting the Evidence on Policy Attitude Stability." *The Journal of Politics* 81(1): 274-90.
- Baunach, Dawn Michelle. 2012. "Changing Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes in America from 1988 Through 2010." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(2): 364-78.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. 2019. "The Medicaid Expansion and Attitudes Toward the Affordable Care Act" Testing for a Policy Feedback on Mass Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83(1): 123-34.
- Skitka, Linda J., Brittany E. Hanson, G. Scott Morgan, and Daniel C. Wisneski. 2021. "The Psychology of Moral Conviction." *Annual Review of Psychology* 72: 347-66.

1/27 – Affective Polarization

Readings

- Mason, Liliana and Julie Wronski. 2018. "One Tribe to Bind Them All: How Our Social Group Attachment Strengthen Partisanship." *Political Psychology* 39(51): 257-77.
- Mason, Liliana. 2018. "Ideologues Without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82(S1): 866-87.
- Barber, Michael and Jeremy C. Pope. 2019. "Does Party Trump Ideology? Disentangling Party and Ideology in America." *American Political Science Review* 113(1): 38-54.
- Lelkes, Yphtach. 2021. "Policy Over Party: Comparing the Effects of Candidate Ideology and Party on Affective Polarization." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(1): 189-96.
- Orr, Lilla V. and Gregory A. Huber. 2020. "The Policy Basis of Measured Partisan Animosity in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(3): 569-86.

2/3 – Attitudes and Emotions Behind American Political Behavior

Readings

- Peterson, Michael Bang, Daniel Sznycer, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby. 2012. "Who Deserves Help? Evolutionary Psychology, Social Emotions, and Public Opinion about Welfare." *Political Psychology* 33(3): 395-418.
- Clifford, Scott and Spencer Piston. 2017. "Explaining Public Support for Counterproductive Homelessness Policy: The Role of Disgust." *Political Behavior* 39: 503-25.
- Hetherington, Marc J. and Elizabeth Suhay. 2011. "Authoritarianism, Threat, and Americans' Support for the War on Terror." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 546-60
- 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): 156-70.

Clifford, Scott and Lucas Lothamer. 2025. "How Strong Policy Attitudes Activate Support for Aggressive Political Action." *Political Behavior* 47: 1275-93.

Topic due by Thursday (2/5) 11:59pm – email to instructor

2/10 – Primary Elections: Voting, Ideology, and Effects

Readings

Lau, Richard R. 2013. "Correct Voting in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Nominating Elections." *Political Behavior* 35: 331-355.

Hall, Andrew B. 2015. "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" *American Political Science Review* 109(1): 18-42.

Brady, David W., Hahrie Han and Jeremy C. Pope. 2007. "Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(1): 79-105.

Henderson, Michael. 2015. "Finding the Way Home: The Dynamics of Partisan Support in Presidential Campaigns." *Political Behavior* 37(4): 889-910.

Simas, Elizabeth N. and Lucas Lothamer. 2025. "Not Just Who, But How: Further Probing the Connection Between Primary Election Dissatisfaction and General Election Voting Behavior." *Electoral Studies* 96.

2/17 – Campaigns and Elections: Attitudes, Traits, and the Economy

Readings

Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven Webster. 2016. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century." *Electoral Studies* 41: 12-22.

Schaffner, Brian F., Matthew MacWilliams and Tatishe Nteta. 2018. "Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism." *Political Science Quarterly* 133(1): 9-34.

Krupnikov, Yanna, Spencer Piston and Nichole M. Bauer. 2016. "Saving Face: Identifying Voter Responses to Black Candidates and Female Candidates." *Political Psychology* 37(2): 253-73.

Simas, Elizabeth N. 2022. "But Can She Make America Great Again? Threat, Stability, and Support for Female Candidates in the United States." *Political Behavior* 44: 1-21.

Lacy, Dean and Dino P. Christenson. 2017. "Who Votes for the Future? Information, Expectations, and Endogeneity in Economic Voting." *Political Behavior* 39: 347-75.

2/24 – Campaigns and Elections: Effects of Campaign Messaging

Readings

Stone, Walter J. and Elizabeth N. Simas. 2010. "Candidate Valence and Ideological Positions in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 371-388.

Huber, Gregory A. and Kevin Arceneaux. 2007. "Identifying the Persuasive Effects of Presidential Advertising." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 957-77.

Sides, John, Lynn Vavreck and Christopher Warshaw. 2022. "The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections." *American Political Science Review* 116(2): 702-18.

- Kalla, Joshua L and David E. Broockman. 2018. "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 112(1): 148-66.
- Krupnikov, Yanna. 2011. "When Does Negativity Demobilize? Tracing the Conditional Effect of Negative Campaigning on Voter Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(4): 797-813.

3/03 – Formation of Congress

Readings

- Polsby, Nelson W. 1968. "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives." *The American Political Science Review* 62(1): 144-168.
- Jenkins, Jeffery A. and Charles Stewart III. 2018. "The Deinstitutionalization (?) of the House of Representatives: Reflections on Nelson Polsby's 'The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives' at Fifty." *Studies in American Political Development* 32 (2): 166-87.
- Gamm, Gerald and Kenneth Shepsle. 1989. "Emergence of Legislative Institutions: Standing Committees in the House and Senate, 1810-1825." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14(1): 39-66.
- Squire, Peverill. 2006. "Historical Evolution of Legislatures in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9(1): 19-44.

3/10 – Spring Break (No Class)

Theory/lit review due by Thursday (3/12) 11:59pm

3/17 – The Contemporary Congress

Readings

- Binder, Sarah. 1999. "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96." *The American Political Science Review* 93:3 519-33.
- Curry, James M. 2019. "Knowledge, Expertise, and Committee Power in the Contemporary Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 44(2): 203-37.
- Ritchie, Melinda N. 2018. "Back-Channel Representation: A Study of the Strategic Communication of Senators with the US Department of Labor." *The Journal of Politics* 80(1): 240-53.
- Harden, Jeffrey J., and Justin H. Kirkland. 2021. "Does Transparency Inhibit Political Compromise?" *American Journal of Political Science* 65(2): 493-509.
- Bolton, Alexander and Sharece Thrower. 2015. "Legislative Capacity and Executive Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 649-63.

3/24 – Presidential Power

Readings

- Ku, Julian G. 2010. "Unitary Executive Theory and Exclusive Presidential Powers." *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 122: 615-21.
- Levinson, Sanford. 2022. "Confronting the Modern Executive: Four Perspectives." *Perspective on Politics* 20(2): 646-52.

- Rogowski, Jon. 2016. "Presidential Influence in an Era of Congressional Dominance." *American Political Science Review* 110(2): 324-41.
- Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2012. "Presidents and the Political Economy: The Coalitional Foundations of Presidential Power." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42(1): 101-31.
- Reeves, Andrew, Jon C. Rogowski, Min Hee Seo, and Andrew R. Stone. 2017. "The Contextual Determinants of Support for Unilateral Action." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47(3): 448-70.

3/31 – Presidential Approval

Readings

- Dahl, Robert A. 1990. "Myth of the Presidential Mandate." *Political Science Quarterly* 105(3): 355-72.
- Newman, Brian. 2003. "Integrity and Presidential Approval, 1980-2000." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67(3): 335-67.
- Fauvelle-Aymar, Christine and Mary Stegmaier. 2011. "The Stock Market and U.S. Presidential Approval." *Electoral Studies* 32(3): 411-17.
- Donovan, Kathleen, Paul M. Kellstedt, Ellen M. Key and Matthew J. Lebo. 2020. "Motivated Reasoning, Public Opinion, and Presidential Approval." *Political Behavior* 42: 1201-21.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2020. "Donald Trump and the Parties: Impeachment, Pandemic, Protest, and Electoral Politics in 2020." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50(4):762-95.

4/07 – Judicial Decisions: Ideology, Legality, and Constraints

Readings

- Epstein, Lee, Christopher M. Parker, and Jeffrey A. Segal. 2018. "Do Justices Defend the Speech They Hate?" *Journal of Law and Courts* 6(2): 237-62.
- Zorn, Christopher and Jennifer Barnes Bowie. 2010. "Ideological Influence on Decision Making in the Federal Judiciary Hierarchy: An Empirical Assessment." *The Journal of Politics* 72(4): 1212-21.
- Bartels, Brandon L. 2009. "The Constraining Capacity of Legal Doctrine on the U.S. Supreme Court." *American Political Science Review* 103(3): 474-95.
- Mark, Alyx and Michael A. Zills. 2019. "The Conditional Effectiveness of Legislative Threats: How Court Curbing Alters the Behavior of (Some) Supreme Court Justices." *Political Research Quarterly* 72(3): 570-83.
- Clark, Tom S. 2009. "The Separation of Powers, Court Curbing, and Judicial Legitimacy." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 971-89.

4/14 – Public Opinion and the Supreme Court

Readings

- Gibson, James L., Gregory A. Caldeira, and Lester Kenyatta Spence. 2003. "Measuring Attitudes toward the United States Supreme Court." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(2): 354-67.
- Bartels, Brandon L. and Christopher D. Johnston. 2013. "On the Ideological Foundations of Supreme Court Legitimacy in the American Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1): 184-99.

Gibson, James L. and Michael J. Nelson. 2015. "Is the U.S. Supreme Court's Legitimacy Grounded in Performance Satisfaction and Ideology?" *Midwest Political Science Association* 59(1): 162-74.

Christenson, Dino P. and David M. Glick. 2019. "Reassessing the Supreme Court: How Decisions and Negativity Bias Affect Legitimacy." *Political Research Quarterly* 72(3): 637-52.

Gibson, James L. 2025. "Do the Effects of Unpopular Supreme Court Rulings Linger? The *Dobbs* Decision Rescinding Abortion Rights." *American Political Science Review* 119(1): 500-07.

Final Paper Due by 4/17 at 11:59pm CST

4/21 – Class presentations

4/28 – Class presentations