

POS 6207 | Political Behavior

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
SPRING 2026

Instructor: David Macdonald, Ph.D.

Email: davidmacdonald@ufl.edu

Time & Location:

- Thursday 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (WEIM 1070)

Office Hours:

- Anderson Hall 210
- Tuesdays 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
- Also by email appointment if necessary

Course Description

Political Behavior (POS 6207) is a graduate-level seminar-style course that introduces students to the field of political behavior. This broadly refers to how and why ordinary people make the political decisions that they do. This course will focus primarily on political behavior in the United States, but many of the ideas and conclusions are applicable to other contexts and countries. It is geared primarily toward students pursuing a Ph.D. in political science, but is also appropriate for M.A. students pursuing graduate study in political campaigning. My hope is that by the end of this course, you will develop your own novel research question and derive a way to properly answer it. You will also ideally continue moving from being primarily a passive receiver of research toward being both a critical consumer of existing research *and* a producer of new knowledge.

Required Texts & Readings

There are 4 required texts for this class. You can purchase these books from a variety of sources (choose the cheapest option!). To save you time, I will make all journal articles electronically available as a PDF on the course Canvas page. The readings in this syllabus represent a small fraction of existing work in the field of political behavior. In preparing for exams and in developing a fuller understanding of the literature, you should read widely!

- Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2017. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton University Press.
- Aldrich, John H., Suhyeon Bae, and Bailey K. Saunders. 2024. *The Fundamental Voter: American Electoral Democracy, 1952-2020*. Oxford University Press.
- Kinder, Donald R., and Nathan P. Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal Nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. University of Chicago Press.
- Shaw, Daron, and John Petrocik. 2020. *The Turnout Myth: Voting Rates and Partisan Outcomes in American National Elections*. Oxford University Press.

Course Policies

Canvas

The course website will be on Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>). It is here (click on the “Files” tab) that you will be able to access all of the assignment instructions and readings.

Grades

Your overall course grade will be comprised of the following components. Further instructions about these assignments will be given in class and posted on the course website.

- **Class Participation & Engagement With Readings** ($\approx 50\%$)
 - Quantity and quality of your oral contributions in our seminar discussions
 - Ph.D. students are required to lead discussion for one class meeting (lmk via email)
 - Critical analysis of one journal article on the syllabus reading list
 - Approximately 500-750 words ($\approx 2-3$ pages) in length
 - Should briefly summarize AND (most importantly) constructively critique!
 - Submit 4 total hard copies in class (no more than 1 per week)
- **Research Design Paper** ($\approx 50\%$)
 - Detailed instructions posted on Canvas
 - Write the first half of a potentially publishable original research paper
 - Topic should focus on U.S. political behavior and employ existing survey data
 - Due to the instructor via email (as a PDF) by 11:59 PM on Wednesday 04/04

Grading Criteria

Letter grades are much more subjective in graduate school and will be assigned based on the following criteria. The components refer to (1) class participation/engagement with assignment readings, and (2) the research design paper.

- **A**
 - High quality performance in both components
- **A–**
 - High quality in one component and acceptable quality in the other component
- **B+**
 - Acceptable quality performance in both components
- **B**
 - Acceptable quality in one component and low quality in the other component
- **B– (or below)**
 - Low quality in both components and/or missing work

Use of A.I. Programs

Using such programs to write for you is **completely unacceptable**. I view it as cheating and the penalty for doing so will be, at a minimum, a ZERO on the assignment. While I'm sure "A.I." programs have their uses, there is no reason to have it write papers for you. Doing so is low character behavior that constitutes academic dishonesty. **USE YOUR OWN BRAIN.**

Extra Credit

I DO NOT give out extra credit, but I am willing to round up borderline grades in certain cases. Student participation, preparation, and effort may be taken into consideration in deciding whether to round up borderline grades.

Absences & Late Work

Missing class is simply not acceptable in graduate school, save for a family/medical emergency or a major extenuating life circumstance. Late work will also not be accepted except as a result of unusual/extenuating circumstances that have been discussed with the instructor.

Email

All email correspondence in this course must be through your UF student email. Please keep it professional when writing and responding to emails.

Electronics

I expect you to keep your phones away and to only use laptops for the purpose of note-taking. If I notice that you are frequently using such devices for other purposes and thus not paying attention nor participating in class, then I will NOT round up your borderline grades.

Decorum

Students in this course are expected to follow the "Golden Rule" of treating others as you wish to be treated. Everyone in this class has the right to speak and to be heard, but this right is not unlimited. Ultimately, we are all responsible for the things we say and do. There will also be ZERO tolerance regarding any threats of violence toward the instructor(s) and/or students, be they verbal or written. Such threats will be reported to University Police.

Reasonable Accommodations

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes difficult and unfortunate things happen in our lives that can make attending class and thus being academically successful very difficult. As such, I am willing, if possible, to help you overcome such difficulties. If you are experiencing challenging life circumstances and need help to succeed in the course, please speak to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to as it will often be too late for me to do anything. Please see the following link (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/helping-students/your-well-being/>) and/or reach out to a medical professional for any physical or mental health problems.

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus and course schedule during the semester as necessary. That being said, if there are any changes, every effort will be made to alert you in writing as far in advance as possible.

University Policies

Academic Honor Code

UF students are bound by the University's Honor Pledge which states: "We the members of the University Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor and see the following link (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>). In short, don't cheat! The costs FAR outweigh the benefits!

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who are requesting special accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) or **352-392-8565**) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who

publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. Additional information is available at the following link (<https://aa.ufl.edu/policies/in-class-recording/>).

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu>). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results are available to students (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>).

Course Schedule

You are expected to complete ALL of the assigned readings before our weekly class meeting, which will consist ENTIRELY of a seminar-style discussion. I know it seems like a lot (and it is), but please make your best effort to get the main ideas from each article and/or book. Consistently blowing off the readings or putting in minimal effort will not only reflect in your course grade, but will ultimately hinder your academic career. In order to do well in this class, you need to speak up! If you sit there in silence, I will assume you haven't done any of the readings and/or that you don't have anything consequential or insightful to say. I would much rather you "take a risk" and potentially say something incorrect rather than not try at all. Additionally, ask questions if you are unsure about something! A consistent failure to speak up and constructively participate orally will make it nearly impossible for you to earn an "A" grade in the course. My hope is that these readings will introduce you to the broader political science literature, give you ideas for your own research design (due later in the semester), and model what high-quality research papers are supposed to look like. In short, you should come prepared to intelligently discuss the assigned readings (it will be obvious to myself and your classmates if you are not prepared). All articles will be available for download as a PDF in the "Files" tab on the course Canvas page.

Week 1 - NO CLASS

- Class Meeting
 - NONE on Thursday 01/15 (instructor attending SPSA conference)
- Carefully read through the syllabus
 - Feel free to email me with any questions!

Week 2 - Theories of Political Behavior

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (01/22)
- Readings
 - Achen and Bartels (2017) *Democracy for Realists* (read the whole book)
 - Lucas et al. (2025) *American Political Science Review*

Week 3 - Political Information and Citizen Competence

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (01/29)
- Readings
 - Broockman and Kalla (2025) *Journal of Politics*
 - Cramer and Toff (2017) *Perspectives on Politics*
 - Enders et al. (2023) *Political Behavior*
 - Freeder, Lenz, and Turney (2019) *Journal of Politics*
 - Graham (2023) *American Political Science Review*
 - Taber and Lodge (2006) *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 4 - Ideology and Mass Belief Systems

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (02/05)
- Readings
 - Kinder and Kalmoe (2017) *Neither Liberal Nor Conservative* (read the whole book)

Week 5 - Public Opinion I

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (02/12)
- Readings
 - Barber and Pope (2019) *American Political Science Review*
 - Elder and O'Brian (2022) *American Political Science Review*
 - Lau and Redlawsk (2001) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Sears, Lau, and Tyler (1980) *American Political Science Review*
 - Vishwanath (2025) *British Journal of Political Science*
 - Zaller and Feldman (1992) *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 6 - Public Opinion II

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (02/19)
- Readings
 - Enns (2014) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Green, Hamel, and Miller (2024) *Perspectives on Politics*
 - Ghitza, Gelman, and Auerbach (2023) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Wolak and Peterson (2020) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Wlezien (1995) *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 7 - Voting Behavior I

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (02/26)
- Readings
 - Carmines and Stimson (1980) *American Political Science Review*
 - Ellis and Ura (2021) *Social Science Quarterly*
 - Gomez and Wilson (2001) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Lenz (2009) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Macdonald (2023) *Political Psychology*
 - Piston (2010) *Political Behavior*

Week 8 - Voting Behavior II

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (03/05)
- Readings
 - Aldrich, Bae, and Saunders (2024) *The Fundamental Voter* (read the whole book)

Week 9 - Presentation and Discussion of Research Proposals

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (03/12)
- Present Research Design Paper Proposals (5-10 min slideshow)

Week 10 - SPRING BREAK

- Use this time to relax, have fun, and/or work on various projects

Week 11 - Voter Turnout and Political Participation I

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (03/26)
- Readings
 - Anoll (2018) *American Political Science Review*
 - Ben-Menachem and Morris (2023) *American Political Science Review*
 - Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) *American Political Science Review*
 - Burden et al. (2014) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Frymer, Grumbach, and Hill (2025) *Perspectives on Politics*
 - Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Hertel-Fernandez (2017) *Journal of Politics*

Week 12 - Voter Turnout and Political Participation II

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (04/02)
- Readings
 - Shaw and Petrocik (2020) *The Turnout Myth* (read the whole book)

Week 13 - Polarization and the Nationalization of American Electoral Politics

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (04/09)
- Readings
 - Abramowitz and Webster (2016) *Electoral Studies*
 - Amlani and Algara (2021) *Electoral Studies* (short article)
 - Cavari and Freedman (2023) *American Political Science Review* (short article)
 - Fiorina (2024) *Hoover Institution* (easy to read essays)
 - Kuriwaki (2026) *Journal of Politics*
 - Westwood et al. (2022a) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
 - Zingher and Flynn (2018) *British Journal of Political Science*

Week 14 - Present Final Research Papers

- Class Meeting
 - Thursday (04/16)
- Email final papers and accompanying slides to instructor by 11:59 PM on Wednesday (04/15)
 - Send paper as a PDF with a title and labeled page numbers
 - Send slides (no more than 10) as either a PowerPoint or a PDF
- Present Final Research Design Papers in class on Thursday (04/16)
 - Slide presentation between 5-10 minutes in length