POLITICAL SCIENCE 3180
VOTING, ELECTIONS, AND PUBLIC OPINION

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Office Hours: MW 4:30-5:30 and by appointment

Fall Semester 2025
MW 3:00-4:20
GC 3680

What do Americans know about politics? Do they follow political news closely or not at all? Do Americans trust government? Do most Americans really value democracy? Does public opinion in the United States influence public policy? Who participates in politics in the United States and who does not? How do Americans make their decisions about how to vote? Does it really matter who wins and who loses elections? Are there ways to lessen the negative impact of partisan polarization on Americans elections?

These are the types of questions that we will examine in this course. Our aim is to learn about electoral politics, voting, and public opinion in the United States in order to gain a more complete understanding of American democracy. In this course we seek to understand the attitudes and behavior of individuals as well as the institutions and processes associated with campaigns and elections. We also want to learn more about how political scientists approach the study of public opinion and political behavior.

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- describe how Americans learn about politics and form opinions on political matters;
- explain how collective public opinion in the US can be characterized on topics such as political knowledge, trust in government, and democratic attitudes;
- discuss knowledgably important features of American elections, including individual political participation and vote choice;
- assess theories and evidence related to the study of public opinion, voting and elections; and
- evaluate key aspects of American elections, voting, and public opinion.

Course Requirements
Course grades will be based on the following requirements:

1. attend and participation in class discussion (100 points);
2. four online discussion posts (160 points);
3. three online quizzes (240 points);
4. one paper assignment (100 points);
5. a comprehensive final exam (200 points).

Students are expected to attend all classes and be prepared to discuss the material in the assigned readings. The discussion posts will be assigned and submitted though Canvas. Please be sure to check Canvas regularly during the semester so that you know when discussion topics are available and when your online discussion submissions are due. These discussion assignments may include additional reading and will require you to submit a short, but thoughtful, posting on the topic. The three online quizzes will cover material from the class presentations and the textbook. The quizzes are open book but must be completed within 30 minutes of starting the quiz. Two paper topics will be available in Canvas (each about 7-8 double-spaced pages) and you will select one of these paper assignments to submit. The electronic version of your paper will be submitted to turnitin.com which is a program to detect plagiarism. The final is a comprehensive, closed book, in-person examination.

Required Course Texts

Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2021. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. 4th edition. Sage.

Levendusky, Matthew. 2023. *Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide*. University of Chicago Press.

The textbooks are available electronically in Canvas as part of Utah Day 1 Access. The Day 1 Access program ensures students are able to access books electronically from the first day of class. You are able to opt out of this electronic access program if you choose, but you will need to obtain the text books for this class on your own if you choose to opt out of the Day 1 Access. For more about the program see the Campus Store website.

Course Outline

Week 1, August 18 and 20, Introduction: Public Opinion and Elections in a Democracy
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 1

Week 2, August 25 and 27, The Study of Public Opinion and Elections
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Appendix to Chapter 1 (pp. 30-45)

Week 3, September 3, American Political Culture and Political Socialization
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 2

Week 4, September 8 and 10, Political Socialization (continued)

Week 5, September 15 and 17, The Role of the Mass Media
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 3

Week 6, September 22 and 24, How Do Americans Think about Politics?
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapters 4 and 5

***** Quiz 1 on material from Weeks 1-5 due by Friday, September 26, 11:59 pm**

Week 7, September 29 and October 1, Where Do Political Attitudes Come From?
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapters 6 and 7

**** Paper option one due: Wednesday, October 1 ****

Week 8, **No Class: Fall Break**

Week 9, October 13 and 15, Americans and Democratic Attitudes
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapters 8, 9, and 10

Week 10, October 20 and 22, How Much Do Americans Trust Government?
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 11

***** Quiz 2 on material from Weeks 6-9 due by Friday, October 24, 11:59 pm**

Week 11, October 27 and 29, Does Public Opinion Direct Public Policy?
Read: Clawson and Oxley, Chapters 12 and 13

Week 12, November 3 and 5, Voting: Turnout and Vote Choice
Note: **Election Day** is Tuesday, November 4, 2025

Week 13, November 10 and 12, Can American Electoral Politics Be Improved?
Read: Levendusky, Chapters 1, 2, and 3

***** Quiz 3 on Weeks 10-12 due by Friday, November 14, 11:59 pm**

Week 14, November 17 and 19, Improving American Politics? (continued)
Read: Levendusky, Chapters 4, 5, and 6

**** Paper option two due: Wednesday, November 19 ****

Week 15, November 24 and 26, Improving American Politics? (continued)
Read: Levendusky, Chapter 7
Note: Thanksgiving Break, November 27-28

Week 16, December 1 and 3, Summary and Review for Final

***** Final Examination: Friday, December 12, 3:30-5:30 pm *****

Statement on Academic Honesty: All students are expected to meet the standards of academic honesty in this course. Academic honesty requires, among other things, that the quizzes, papers, and examinations you submit in this course must be your own work. Any course work that you submit should be the product of your individual effort and not the work of others. Work submitted for this course must not have been submitted in a previous course nor may it be submitted in any course being taken concurrently without the knowledge and approval of all instructors concerned.

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions per the Student Code: Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code: "... includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information…It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct." For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Safety: The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, go to: http://safeu.utah.edu

Civil Rights: Violence or harassment based on sex and gender (including sexual orientation and gender identity) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status, or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to university officials: Office of the Equal Opportunity (135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, oeo.utah.edu) or Office of the Dean of Students (270 Union Building, 801-581-7066, deanofstudents.utah.edu). To file a police report, contact Campus Police (801-585-COPS). To privately explore options and resources contact the Center for Campus Wellness (350 Student Services Building, 801-581-7776, wellness.utah.edu).

Equal Access: The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability and Access (CDA). CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. Prior notice is appreciated. To read the full accommodations policy for the University of Utah, please see Section Q of the Instruction and Evaluation regulations. In compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, some students may need to record course content. Any recordings of course content are for personal use only, should not be shared, and should never be made publicly available. In addition, recordings must be destroyed at the conclusion of the course. If you will need accommodations in this class, or for more information about what support they provide, contact: Center for Disability and Access, Student Services Building, Room 350, 801-581-5020, disability.utah.edu

Classroom Conduct: Please be sure that your cell phone is stored at the start of class and remains stored during class time. It is not permissible to make phone calls, send text messages, or send email during class.

Schedule Changes: The schedule of examinations, assignments, or due dates may need to be changed based upon events during the semester. If changes need to be made, advance notification will be made in class and in Canvas.

Grading Distribution: The following distribution will be used in this course.

A	94% and above
A-	90% - 93%
B+	88% - 89%
B	83% - 87%
B-	80% - 82%
C+	78% - 79%
C	73% - 77%
C-	70% - 72%
D+	68% - 69%
D	63% - 67%
D-	60% - 62%
E	59% and below

Political Science Major and Minor: Political science is one of the most popular majors on campus and offers four optional areas of emphasis. We also offer a minor in political science. The political science major provides excellent preparation for a variety of careers in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors, or to undertake graduate study in an academic or professional program such as law or public administration. Each year the department awards competitive scholarships to students who are declared political science majors. Political science students can earn credit toward the major while taking advantage of numerous internships opportunities, many

with financial support, through the Hinckley Institute of Politics. If you are interested in political science as a major, double major, or minor, please schedule an appointment with a political science advisor from the Department of Political Science website.