

POLS 4520

Electoral Behavior

Days:	Monday-Wednesday-Friday	Instructor:	Dr. Ben Kantack
Time:	2:30PM-3:20PM	Office:	380B Baldwin Hall
Room:	301 Baldwin Hall	Email:	ben.kantack@uga.edu
Office Hours:	Tuesday 10:00AM-11:00AM (or by appointment)	Telephone:	(best way to contact) 706-542-8203

Course Description

Every year, millions of dollars are spent in the United States alone on attempting to predict and influence electoral behavior. To gain and keep power in democracies, political parties and candidates strive to understand and manipulate voters. But how much can voters really be manipulated? Do they follow logical reasoning processes or fall victim to cheap tricks and random factors? How do the rules of electoral systems shape the actions of voters and candidates? At a fundamental level, how do we know whether elections are “working” or not?

The purpose of this course is to develop an understanding of electoral behavior in the United States and abroad. We will begin with the theoretical foundations of elections and democracy, proceed to take stock of democratic citizens and their political tendencies, and conclude by examining how parties, candidates, and voters interact with one another in campaign environments.

Required Reading

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be assigned for all but four class sessions and will primarily consist of political science journal articles and book chapters. Academic writing is often dense. For that reason, we will spend the second class session developing tools for reading political science research.

All readings will be accessible via [eLearningCommons](#). The finalized reading list will be distributed no later than the first day of class. Students will be expected to complete all readings before the class sessions for which they are assigned.

Grading

Grades will be allocated as follows:

- *Discussion* (20% of final grade): Weeks marked with an asterisk (*) in the course schedule will feature an online discussion activity, in which students will be randomly sorted into small groups to discuss the week’s topics and readings. Students will be required to complete one initial post by **11:59PM on Thursday** and at least one response post by **11:59PM on Friday**. Additional responses are encouraged but will not be required. Participation will be graded based on whether it demonstrates understanding of course concepts and is germane to the discussion.
- *Reading quizzes* (10% of final grade): If online and in-class discussion demonstrates a satisfactory level of reading comprehension, no reading quizzes will be administered and all students

will receive full credit for this component of their final grade. If online and in-class discussion demonstrates an unsatisfactory level of reading comprehension, reading quizzes will be administered randomly at the beginning of certain class sessions. Reading quizzes cannot be made up before or after the fact by students who are late or absent to the class sessions in which they are administered. In the event that reading quizzes are administered, each student's two lowest quiz grades will be automatically dropped from their final grade calculation.

- *Reform paper* (25% of final grade): Throughout the course, students will learn about how electoral rules and institutions shape voter, candidate, and party behavior. This learning will culminate in a position paper in which students will advocate for a reform of their choice to be made to the American electoral system, justifying their argument based on both normative considerations and empirical conclusions from political science. Further details will be provided in class.
- *Exams* (45% of final grade): Three equally-weighted exams will be given. Two will take place during regular class sessions; the third will be held during the final exam period, but will be roughly the same size and difficulty as the first two. Exams will be designed to be non-cumulative; however, knowledge of the contents of an early exam may indirectly influence performance on a later exam.

Late discussion posts and analysis papers will be penalized 10% for every full or partial day that elapses before they are submitted.

Grading Scale

93 – 100:	A	83 – 86:	B	73 – 76:	C	0 – 59:	F
90 – 92:	A-	80 – 82:	B-	70 – 72:	C-		
87 – 89:	B+	77 – 79:	C+	60 – 69:	D		

Extra Credit Policy

From time to time, extra credit may be offered in the context of in-class activities. These extra credit opportunities will be conditional upon attendance and cannot be made up under any circumstances. No other forms of extra credit will be available.

Attendance Policy

Attendance will not be graded. Physical presence in a classroom is correlated with, but does not in and of itself constitute, academic achievement. Students who are late or absent should consult their fellow classmates to obtain any desired notes regarding what they missed. Note-taking aids will be posted to [eLearningCommons](#), but lecture slides will not be disseminated outside of class. Students who are absent from class sessions in which exams are held must notify the instructor before the start of said class session to initiate the process of scheduling a make-up exam. If the instructor is not notified of the absence until the start of the class session, a 10% penalty will be assessed for each full or partial day that elapses until a make-up exam has been scheduled.

Discussion Policy

Discussion enhances learning when participants are able to express their views without fear of reprisal, presume good faith in their interlocutors, and abide by standards of civility and decorum. Students should feel free to respectfully challenge their peers' opinions, and should expect to have their own opinions respectfully challenged by their peers or by the instructor.

Electronic Devices Policy

The use of laptop computers and tablets will be permitted for class purposes only. The use of telephones will not be permitted. Students whose use of electronic devices becomes disruptive will be asked to discontinue said use and may be asked to leave the room.

Academic Integrity Policy

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in "A Culture of Honesty" found at <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Disability Accommodation Policy

Students desiring disability accommodations should consult the [Disability Resource Center](#) and should notify the instructor as soon as possible.

Course Schedule

NOTE: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

Friday, January 5 Course Introduction

WEEK 2: FOUNDATIONS*

Monday, January 8 How to Read Political Science

Wednesday, January 10 Democratic Theory

Friday, January 12 The Electoral Connection

WEEK 3: MODELS*

Monday, January 15 NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Wednesday, January 17 Spatial Voting

Friday, January 19 Directional Voting

WEEK 4: SYSTEMS*

Monday, January 22 Systems, Part I

Wednesday, January 24 Systems, Part II

Friday, January 26 Systems, Part III

WEEK 5: RULES*

Monday, January 29 Strategic Voting

Wednesday, January 31 Primaries & Runoffs

Friday, February 2 Compulsion & Registration

WEEK 6: SHENANIGANS

Monday, February 5 Gerrymanders

Wednesday, February 7 Voter ID

Friday, February 9 **EXAM I**

WEEK 7: ATTITUDES*

Monday, February 12 Attitudes

Wednesday, February 14 Ideology

Friday, February 16 Partisanship

WEEK 8: ORIGINS*

Monday, February 19 Socialization

Wednesday, February 21 Identities

Friday, February 23 Personality & Biology

WEEK 9: COGNITION*

Monday, February 26 Knowledge

Wednesday, February 28 Heuristics

Friday, March 2 Information Processing

WEEK 10: STABILITY

Monday, March 5 Media

Wednesday, March 7 Motivated Reasoning

Friday, March 9 **EXAM II**

WEEK 11: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 12: CAMPAIGNS*

Monday, March 19 Fundamentals

Wednesday, March 21 Polls, Part I

Friday, March 23 Polls, Part II

WEEK 13: PARTICIPATION*

Monday, March 26 Participation

Wednesday, March 28 Turnout & Mobilization

Friday, March 30 Targeting

WEEK 14: ECONOMICS

Monday, April 2 Retrospective Voting

Wednesday, April 4 NO CLASS – MPSA CONFERENCE

Friday, April 6 NO CLASS – MPSA CONFERENCE

WEEK 15: PERSUASION*

Monday, April 9 Shocks

Wednesday, April 11 Advertising

Friday, April 13 Persuasion

WEEK 16: DEMOCRACY*

Monday, April 16 Competence

Wednesday, April 18 Inequality

Friday, April 20 Macro Opinion

Reform paper due via email at 11:59PM on Friday, April 20

WEEK 17: CONCLUSION

Monday, April 23 Catchup/Review

FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY, APRIL 27 (3:30PM-6:30PM)