Professor Donald Green

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Office hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3:00p ET (online)

Spring 2021

**Theories and Debates in American Politics II: POLSGR6211**

Thursday 2:10 – 4:00p

This Ph.D. level course focuses on core research themes in the study of political behavior in the United States:

(1) The nature of mass preferences: the content, coherence, and stability of political attitudes, beliefs, and tastes

(2) Representation: the conditions under which the views of the public and/or interest groups are translated into actions by elected and appointed officials, and, in turn, public policy

(3) Political divisions and commonalities: how lines of division marked by party, class, ethnicity, region, gender, etc. evolve over time and express themselves through electoral and non-electoral behavior

Political behavior is a vast field, and one semester is too brief to cover all the major topics, let alone all the research on a given topic. Your seminar paper is an opportunity for you to delve deeply into a specific topic. Kindly do not write on a topic that you have worked on before or that you are working on for another class.

**Requirements and Assignments**

You will be asked to (1) participate actively in discussions every week, (2) give a 15 minute “opinion roundup” talk to the class during week four/five, (3) take an in-class final exam on ideas and controversies covered in the readings (a warm-up for comprehensive doctoral exams), and (4) compose a 25-page literature review paper on a topic of your choosing, to be turned in on the date of the final exam.

Please clear your paper topics with me before spring break. A preliminary draft of this paper should be discussed with me in office hours at least three weeks before the final draft is submitted. The format of this paper should follow the *APSR* style guide, which may be found on-line: <http://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/APSA%20Files/publications/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf>.

These graded components of the course will contribute 15%, 10%, 35%, and 40%, respectively, to your final grade.

**Prerequisites**

I assume that students have taken at least one undergraduate or graduate course in American politics. Because quantitative analysis features prominently in the course readings, one semester of graduate-level statistics is required.

**Readings**

During our weekly meetings, we will review each work’s key concepts, claims, flaws, etc. Every student should come to class prepared to discuss each of the readings and the connections among them. In most of the classes I have taught in the past, the weekly readings go well beyond what can reasonably be discussed during seminar time. By contrast, this class will focus attention on a small number of select readings to be assessed in depth; these works should prompt you to ask yourself, What are the remaining unanswered questions? How might we extend the research frontier?

PDFs of articles and book chapters are available at the Courseworks site. You will need to purchase the following books. These are classics that belong in your permanent library (and can be purchased inexpensively on-line).

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lenz, Gabriel S. 2012. *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

John Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 1: Overview and Preliminaries**

The readings this week are designed to set the stage for the discussions in weeks to come. The Berinsky article gives a sense of the current state of survey research. Carmines and Huckfeldt give an overview of where the field stood in the 1990s, prior to the advent of experiments, especially field experiments. Davenport et al. describe and foreshadow some of the changes wrought by increasing use of experimentation.

Berinsky, Adam J. 2017. “Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 309-329.

Carmines, Edward G., and Robert Huckfeldt. 1998. “Political Behavior: An Overview.” In *A New Handbook of Political Science*, Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds.). Retrieved from [www.oxfordscholarship.com](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com).

Davenport, Tiffany C., Alan S. Gerber, and Donald P. Green. 2010. “Field Experiments and the

Study of Political Behavior.” In Jan E. Leighley (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 69-88.

**Week 2: Public Opinion, Attitudes, and Belief Systems**

The starting point for any discussion of voter competence is the Converse (1964) essay. Look closely at Converse’s methods for assessing the existence and range of a belief system. The Kinder (2006) essay assesses whether ideological sophistication has changed appreciably since Converse’s day. Ansolabehere et al. (2008), building on early work of Achen (1975), argue that much of the apparent lack of coherence and stability in mass attitudes is due to measurement error in survey responses.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” In *Ideology and Discontent,* ed. D. E. Apter. New York: Free Press.

Kinder, Donald R. 2006. “Belief Systems Today*.*” *Critical Review* 18 (Winter): 197-216.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, Jr. 2008. “The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 102(2): 215-232.

**Week 3: Political Knowledge And Sophistication Over Time**

These recent works assess what Americans know about politics and the connections among issues.

Barabas, Jason, Jennifer Jerit, William Pollock, and Carlisle Rainey. 2014. “The Question(s) of Political Knowledge.” *American Political Science Review* 108(4): 840–55.

Bullock, John G., Alan S. Gerber, Seth J. Hill and Gregory A. Huber. 2015. “Partisan Bias in Factual Beliefs about Politics.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 10(4): 519-578.

Freeder, 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): 274-290.

Wood, Thomas, and Ethan Porter. 2019. "The elusive backfire effect: Mass attitudes’ steadfast factual adherence." *Political Behavior* 41(1): 135-163.

**Weeks 4 and 5: Contours of American Public Opinion by Race, Class, Gender, Region, and Party**

Students will each give a 15-minute presentation (with slides) on the nature and evolution of public opinion in a given domain. We will ask for sign-ups for domains well ahead of time, but a tentative list of options includes (1) party identification and identification as liberals/conservatives, (2) support for civil liberties and liberal-democratic principles, (3) support for the welfare state and social spending, (4) support for integration, affirmative action, and other policies related to race/ethnicity, (5) environmental protection, (6) gun rights, (7) immigration and multiculturalism, (8) women and gender, (9) taxation and privatization, (10) conservative social policies such as prayer in schools or abortion bans, (11) defense, militarism, internationalism, (12) free trade, (13) institutional reforms such as term-limits or campaign finance regulation. Columbia has access to a host of on-line resources for assembling American opinion data – see, for example, “iPoll” at the Roper Center, ICPSR, or the General Social Survey. Feel free to confer with the reference librarians on campus. When preparing your presentation, look for instances in which the same question is asked over time as well as instances in which different questions are asked at the same point in time. The former helps illuminate trends in opinion, while the latter helps illuminate the range of opinion within a given domain. Where possible, describe how the distribution of opinion varies among different subgroups. Examples of this sort of exercise may be found in “The Polls” articles in *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

**Week 6: Groups and Value Orientations**

If the public does not rely on ideological convictions when evaluating policies and political events, what does it rely on? One answer is group identities and evaluations. This line of argument has grown in prominence over time, as “affective polarization” has (arguably) increased. On the other hand, this thesis has drawn fire from those who argue that issue-orientations shape what groups people see as allies or enemies.

Brady, Henry E., and Paul M. Sniderman. 1985. Attitude Attribution: A Group Basis for Political Reasoning. *American Political Science Review* 79(4): 1061–78.

Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*.  New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapters 1-2.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. 2015. “Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3): 690–707.

Goren, Paul, and Christopher Chapp. 2017. “Moral Power: How Public Opinion on Culture War Issues Shapes Partisan Predispositions and Religious Orientations.” *American Political Science Review* 111(1): 110–28.

**Week 7: Elite Communication and Its Influence on Public Opinion**

This week pairs the Lenz (2012) book (whose thesis is apparent from its title) with the Broockman and Butler (2017) article, which uses some ambitious field experiments to test whether the public tends to follow the issue stances adopted by elected officials.

Broockman, David E., and Daniel M. Butler. 2017. The Causal Effects of Elite Position-Taking

on Voter Attitudes: Field Experiments with Elite Communication. *American Journal of Political Science* 61(1): 208-221.

Lenz, Gabriel S. 2012. *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Week 8: Zaller’s Synthesis (Opinion formation and change)**

This classic work fuses two broad classes of research, one on how it is that people form/express their political opinions and another on how these opinions are shaped by elite communication. Attend closely to what kinds of evidence Zaller adduces and what further evidence might be brought to bear to test his core propositions.

John Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 9: Retrospective evaluations and low-information rationality**

The Achen and Bartels book is a synthesis of several large literatures. It draws on some of the low-information rationality ideas from prior weeks. It also builds on the extensive literature on “retrospective voting” (see Fiorina’s 1981 book) to argue that voters punish incumbents when times are hard regardless of whether the government is run by liberals or conservatives, and even hard times are not plausibly the fault of incumbents. See recent work by Fowler for an empirical critique. You should also familiarize yourself with debates about the relative importance of “pocketbook voting” versus “sociotropic” voting.

Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Optional: Fowler, Anthony, and Andrew B. Hall. 2018. "Do shark attacks influence presidential elections? Reassessing a prominent finding on voter competence." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (4): 1423-1437.

**Week 10: Representation and Mass Preferences**

The vast literature on representation features a large number of influential methodological essays on the conceptualization and measurement. For an early example of this kind of critique, see Achen’s (1978) re-analysis of the highly influential Miller and Stokes (1963) study, which assessed the correlation between constituent opinions and opinion among elected officials. The number of prominent essays in the genre appearing in the past decade serve as a reminder that representation is a high-stakes topic that is studied in methodologically disparate ways. Do these authors agree substantively about extent of policy representation?

Broockman, David E. 2016. Approaches to Studying Policy Representation. Legislative Studies Quarterly 41(1):181-215.

Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2015. From Mass Preferences to Policy. *Annual Review of Political Science* 18:147-165.

Shapiro, Robert Y. 2011. Public Opinion and American Democracy. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (5): 982–1017.

Wlezien, Christopher. 2017. Public Opinion and Policy Representation: On Conceptualization, Measurement, and Interpretation. *Policy Studies Journal* 45:561-582.

Optional: Bafumi, Joseph, and Michael C Herron. 2010. Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of American Voters and Their Members in Congress. *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 519-42.

**Week 11: Political Access and Influence**

For decades, political scientists have studied the extent to which affluent segments of American society exert disproportionate influence over public policy. Gilens and Page (2014) present a well-known recent example of this line of research. Critically evaluate their research design and contrast it to the field experiment described by Kalla and Brockman (2015). Grose (2014) offers a review on recent experimental approaches to the study of elite political behavior.

Grose, Christian R. 2014. Field Experimental Work on Political Institutions. *Annual Review of Political Science* 17:355-370.

Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2015. Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 545-558.

Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens. *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564–81.

**Week 12: Campaign Effects, Persuasion, and Mobilization**

For decades, political scientists have taken up the question, Do campaigns matter? In some ways, the question suggests a paradox – why would campaigns expend vast resources if their efforts were ineffective? In recent years, scholars have contended that the effectiveness of campaign activity varies widely. Kalla and Broockman (2017) offer a sobering meta-analysis of the experimental literature on voter persuasion. Jacobson (2015) provides an overview of the burgeoning literature on persuasion and mobilization, and Druckman and Lupia (2016) do so as well, although the overlap between the two essays is surprisingly small. Hutchings and Jardinia (2009) discuss a form of campaign activity, “priming,” in which campaigns persuade by directing voters’ attention to certain evocative symbols, in this case racial imagery.

Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. How Do Campaigns Matter? *Annual Review of Political Science* 18:31-47.

Druckman, James N., and Arthur Lupia. 2016. Preference Change in Competitive Political Environments. *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:13-31.

Hutchings, Vincent L., and Ashley E. Jardina. 2009. Experiments on Racial Priming in Political Campaigns. *Annual Review of Political Science* 12:397-402.

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): 148-166.

**To be scheduled at the end of the semester: Student Presentations of Research Papers.** This informal session is an opportunity to share what you learned when reviewing the literature for your final paper.

1. Note that this work has been superseded by the publication of Kinder, Donald R., and Nathan P. Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither liberal nor conservative: Ideological innocence in the American public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)