

# GOV 312L, Issues and Policies in American Government

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Office Hours:

Office: MEZ 3.220

Class Hours: MWF 9-10

Class Room: PAR1

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## Course Description

This course fulfills the second legislatively mandated government course that every student graduating from a public university in Texas must take. The course will provide a framework for understanding public opinion and participation in America, as well as how it interacts with some foundational institutions. We will also cover how to measure public opinion and how to execute analysis of political behavior. Course topics include political socialization, knowledge and participation, as well as the institutional effects of these factors.

There are four primary objectives in this course. First, to describe public opinion and some of its crucial components, as well as how they interact with the state in a few key areas. Second, to develop analytical skills by which to understand these interactions. Third, to introduce the work of the political scientist by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline. Fourth, to empower the students to appreciate their role in a properly functioning democracy.

## Required Materials

- Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2017. Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice. 4th Edition. Available on Canvas.
- Supplementary readings, linked on the syllabus.

## Grading policy

Your grade will be based on three exams, three data / reading assignments, and in-class assignments and participation, weighted as follows:

- 60% Exams (3 exams)

- 20% In-class assignments and participation
- 20% Data / reading assignments

**Exams.** Exams will be given three times throughout the semester. They will be multiple choice, and will cover both lectures and readings. Exam material will NOT be cumulative. Each exam will be worth 30 points. In the case of a conflict, please notify me ahead of time so that we can make alternative arrangements.

**In-class assignments and participation.** I will give intermittent short assignments in class that will be graded for participation. You will also be graded on participation in class discussion. Everyone is expected to have done the readings ahead of time so as to be able to participate in these discussions.

**Data / reading assignments.** We will be engaging with polling data throughout the semester, and students will be responsible for turning in a few short essays that are reflections on either that or class readings. More information will follow in class.

Without prior notification and proper documentation, missed exams and assignments cannot be made up, no exceptions. I will not round final grades.

## Grading

A 93-100  
A- 90-92  
B+ 87-89  
B 83-86  
B- 80-82  
C+ 77-79  
C 73-76  
C- 70-72  
D+ 67-69  
D 63-66  
D- 60-62  
F 0-59

## Course Policies

### Electronic Devices During Class

Electronic devices may be used during class only for academic purposes. Students disrupting the class because of their use of electronic devices for non-academic purposes will be asked to leave class.

### Academic Dishonesty

Honor system for exams and writing assignments: By taking this class, the student agrees to abide by the University of Texas regulations concerning cheating. According to the Institutional Rules, scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and falsifying academic records. In the event that a student violates the University policy on scholastic dishonesty, he or she will be subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>.

### University of Texas Honor Code

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

### Student Honor Code

"As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

### Attendance policy

Although attendance is not mandatory, it is expected. Therefore, I do not formally take attendance. Nevertheless, missing class will greatly affect your grade. First, I give in-class assignments and grade on participation. Second, exams are based on a combination of the course readings and class lectures. Thus, missing class will greatly affect your grade.

### Excused Absences

An absence from class will only be excused if proper documentation is presented. In the case of an illness you will need to produce a note from the doctor stating that you could not attend class that day. Generic UHS slips will not be accepted. In all other cases you will need to provide documentation from Student Emergency Services. In the case of planned activities, the documentation must be presented to me at least a week before your scheduled absence. I will not accept a planned activity as a valid excuse for an absence after the fact. In the case of unexpected circumstances, the documentation must be turned in within a week of your return.

### Procedures for Dealing with Grade/Evaluation Concerns

Grade/evaluation concerns will only be considered if the following procedure is followed: All grade complaints must be TYPED and must clearly express the student's specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e. readings, textbook, and/or lecture notes, in order to ensure accuracy. Written statements will not be considered until 48 hours AFTER the assignment is returned to students. This allows the student time to reread their answers and think carefully about what improvements could have been made. Grievances will not be considered once one week has passed. For example, if I return a graded assignment on Monday, the student must submit a complaint BEFORE the Monday of the following week. Once class is over on that Monday, no complaints will be considered for that assignment. Since class time is limited, I will only deal with questions or

concerns during scheduled office hours. Finally, submitting a grade grievance will result in a complete re-grade of the assignment.

## Communication

I will not respond to Canvas messages, only emails to the email address listed on this syllabus. I regularly check my e-mail, but sometimes I am unable to respond quickly. Please allow 24 hours for an e-mail response. In addition, please limit your e-mails to questions about class topics. Any grievances involving the class must be handled during my office hours. Finally, make sure to check the syllabus or Canvas first before sending an e-mail. In many cases they will answer your question.

## Pronoun and Name Preference

Class rosters at UT are provided to the instructor with students' legal names. I will gladly honor any request to address students by a different name. Please inform me of any preferred names, nicknames, or gender pronouns as early as possible so I can adopt them for the entirety of the semester and onward. If there are further accommodations that will make you feel more comfortable in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss them.

## Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

## Religious Holy Day Observance

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## Campus Safety

Please note the following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety>:

- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform the instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
- Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050.
- Further information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>.

## Schedule

### Week 1, 08/22 - 08/26: Introduction

- 8/22: **Class Introduction**
  - Syllabus!
- 8/24: **What is Public Opinion?**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 1
- 8/26: **Political Socialization**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 2

### Week 2, 08/29 - 09/02: The Origins of Public Opinion

- 8/29: **Party Identification, Ideology**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 5
- 8/31: **Social Groups, Group Identity**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 7
- 9/2: **Values, Self-Interest**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 6

### Week 3, 09/05 - 09/09: Political Knowledge

- 9/5: **Knowledge and Attention**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 8
- 9/7: **Heuristics**
- 9/9: **Attitude Stability and Change**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 4

### Week 4, 09/12 - 09/16: Attitudes

- 9/12: **Issue Attitudes**
  - A majority of Americans support “Bidenomics”. The pandemic changed minds dramatically. *MonkeyCage*.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/30/majority-americans-support-bidenomics-pandemic-change/?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=wp\\_monkeycage](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/30/majority-americans-support-bidenomics-pandemic-change/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=wp_monkeycage)
- 9/14: **Policy Preferences**
- 9/16: **No class, assignment due at 5 pm**

### Week 5, 09/19 - 09/23: Measuring Public Opinion

- 9/19: **Polling**
  - VIDEO: Can we still trust polls? *Pew Research Center* <https://www.pewresearch.org/2018/05/14/video-can-we-still-trust-polls/>
- 9/21: **Survey Research**
- 9/23: **Problems and Pitfalls**

### Week 6, 09/26 - 09/30: Political Behavior, Exam 1

- 9/26: **Exam 1**
- 9/28: **Vote Choice**
- 9/30: **No class, assignment due at 5 pm**

**Week 7, 10/03 - 10/07: Political Behavior, cont.**

- 10/3: **Political Participation**
  - Walker, Hannah and Michael Leo Owens. What Gets Ex-Prisoners Politically and Civically Involved? *MonkeyCage*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/21/what-gets-ex-prisoners-politically-involved/>
- 10/5: **Political Participation, cont.**
- 10/7: **Voting and Elections**
  - Galston, William. Telling Americans to Vote, or Else. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/opinion/sunday/telling-americans-to-vote-or-else.html>

**Week 8, 10/10 - 10/14: Media and Campaign Effects**

- 10/10: **The Media**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 3
- 10/12: **Political Parties**
- 10/14: **Political Campaigns**

**Week 9, 10/17 - 10/21: Doing Democracy**

- 10/17: **Access to the Vote**
  - Walker, Hannah. Voter Suppression In A Post-Shelby World. *HuffPost Latino Decisions*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/voter-suppression-in-a-po\\_b\\_13288426](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/voter-suppression-in-a-po_b_13288426)
- 10/19: **Representation**
  - Badger, Emily. As American as Apple Pie? The Rural Vote's Disproportionate Slice of Power. *The New York Times*? *The Upshot*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/upshot/as-american-as-apple-pie-the-rural-votes.html>
- 10/21: **Representation, cont.**

**Week 10, 10/24 - 10/28: Doing Democracy, cont., Exam 2**

- 10/24: **The Carceral State**
  - Stevenson, Bryan. Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/prison-industrial-complex-slavery-racism.html>
- 10/26: **The Carceral State, cont.**
  - PODCAST: The Prison Boom by You're Wrong About. <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1112270/10667808-the-prison-boom>
- 10/28: **Exam 2**

**Week 11, 10/31 - 11/04: Public Opinion and Public Policy**

- 10/31: **Public Policy**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 12
- 11/2: **Public Policy, cont.**
- 11/4: **Trust in Government**
  - Clawson and Oxley, ch 11

**Week 12, 11/07 - 11/11: Election Week**

- 11/7: **Election Preview**
- 11/9: **Post-Election**
- 11/11: **No class, assignment due at 5 pm**

**Week 13, 11/14 - 11/18: Racial and Ethnic Politics**

- 11/14: **Black Politics**

- Cox, Kiana. Most U.S. adults feel what happens to their own racial or ethnic group affects them personally. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/11/linked-fate-connectedness-american>

- 11/16: **Latino Politics**

- 11/18: **White Politics**

- Jardina, Ashley. White identity politics is about more than racism. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/26/18306125/white-identity-politics-trump-racism-ashley-jardina>

**Week 14, 11/21 - 11/25: Thanksgiving Break!****Week 15, 11/28 - 12/02: Political Polarization**

- 11/28: **Political Polarization**
- 11/30: **Public Opinion in Texas**
- 12/2: **Review for Exam**

**Week 16, 12/05 - 12/09: Exam 3**

- 12/5: **Exam 3**