This course surveys major theoretical approaches and empirical research in the field of political behavior. It focuses mainly on psychological approaches to understanding individual citizens’ attitudes and actions, and on the implications of individual choices for both collective outcomes and for the quality of representative democracy. Among the alternative approaches we will encounter are theories of rational choice, personality, information-processing and cognition, social learning, and group identity and conflict. Among the many substantive topics we will investigate are authoritarianism, political socialization, political ideologies, the mass media, racial attitudes, and political participation. The majority of empirical research that we will discuss centers on American politics, although we will read and discuss research that is cross-national or comparative in scope.

It should be noted that much of the empirical research that we read will be quantitative in nature. Familiarity with multivariate statistics will be helpful in understanding these articles, but it is not required.

The course has three learning objectives:

- You will become familiar with a wide range of literatures that are routinely part of Ph.D. field examinations, particularly in American politics.
- You will understand and reflect on contemporary debates in the study of political behavior.
- You will be able to think both appreciatively and critically about social scientific research.

Seminar Organization and Requirements

Our weekly meetings will center on a critical analysis of the assigned readings for that week. At the beginning of the meeting, I will ask everyone to offer a brief comment, question, musing, etc. that will serve to help orient the discussion that follows. I will then have comments to offer—and these may take the form of a quasi-lecture—but thereafter our time will be spent in conversation.

Every week, you are required to write a short essay responding to the week’s readings. It should be 2 double-spaced pages in length. The essays should engage at least several of the week’s readings by doing one of more of the following:

- juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations for or approaches to a substantive topic;
- criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research;
- criticizing the conceptualization and/or measurement of a particular construct;
- analyzing the implications of a set of findings;
- suggesting new question or hypotheses for research; and/or
- identifying similarities to or contrasts with the arguments or research in previous readings.
The essential component of these papers is your own argument. Do not summarize or recapitulate the arguments of the readings.

These papers are due by 5 pm on the Monday before class.

The course’s major assignment is a final exam. The exam will be take-home and will have a (self-enforced) three-hour time limit. You may not use any books or notes. The exam thus mimics in some respects a Ph.D. comprehensive exam. Your course grade will be based primarily on your final exam. Your reaction papers and section participation will count for much less, unless you are systematically failing to produce quality papers or contribute productively to class discussion.

**Readings**
The following books are required:


In addition to these books, there are a number of articles and book chapters. Most of these articles are available on-line via electronic databases (e.g., JSTOR or ALADIN). They can also be found easily with searches on Google Scholar. In a few cases, I will place on Blackboard articles that I have already copied and scanned to pdf format (denoted BB throughout). I strongly suggest that you muster a form of collective action that minimizes the time and printer ink involved in obtaining the readings.

**Topics**
We will cover the following subjects, in this order:

- Personality and authoritarianism
- Rational choice
- Political socialization
- Public opinion and political attitudes
- Ideology and democratic competence
- Political cognition
- Mass media
- Group conflict
- Racial attitudes of whites
- Voter turnout and participation
- Vote choice
- Public opinion and public policy

The final week of class, we will cover a topic of your choosing. We’ll discuss this later in the semester.
Course Plan

Introduction

- Sears, Huddy, and Jervis. Chapter 1.
- Bartels, ch. 1-2. Familiarize yourself with the chapter outline, as we will be reading the chapters out of order.

Personality and Authoritarianism

Personality

- Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapter 4.

Authoritarianism


Further reading

- Other papers by Gerber, Huber, and colleagues on personality: [http://huber.research.yale.edu/writings.html#18](http://huber.research.yale.edu/writings.html#18)
- The work of Robert Altemeyer on “right-wing authoritarianism.”


**Rational Choice and Its Critics**

January 31

• Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapters 2 and 21.


• Chong, chapters 1, 2, and 5.


• Bartels, chapters 3, 6-7.

**Further reading**


**Political Socialization**

February 7

• Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapter 3.


**Further reading**


**Public Opinion and Political Attitudes**

**February 14**


• Zaller, chapters 1-5.


**Further reading**


**Ideology and Democratic Competence**

February 21


• Zaller, revisit pp. 94-96.

• Lewis-Beck et al., chapters 9-10.


**Further reading**


• The rest of *Critical Review* 18 (1-3).

**Political Cognition and Its Limits**

February 28

• Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapter 13.

• Bartels, chapters 4-5.


**Further reading**


• Luskin, Robert C. 2002. “From Denial to Extenuation (and Finally Beyond): Political Sophistication and Citizen Performance.” In James H. Kuklinski (ed.), *Thinking about Political Psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [BB]


Mass Media Influence

- Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapter 11.

Further reading


Groups I: Theories of Group Conflict

- Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapters 15-16.
- Chong, chapter 3.
Further reading

- So much more it’s hard even to make a list.

Groups II: Racial Attitudes among Whites

- Sears, Huddy, and Jervis, chapter 16.
- Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo, chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11.

Further reading

- Various of Sniderman's books, e.g., *Reaching Beyond Race*, and *The Scar of Race*.

Voter Turnout and Political Participation

- Lewis-Beck et al., chapter 5.


Further reading


**Vote Choice**

**April 10**

- Zaller., chapter 10.
- Lewis-Beck et al., chapters 1-4, 6-8, 11-15.
Further reading

- More of The American Voter.

Public Opinion and Public Policy

- Bartels, ch. 8-10.

Further reading