

PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

PSCI 4731 FALL 2006

Dr. Jennifer Wolak
136 Ketchum Hall
wolakj@colorado.edu

Office hours:
M & W 11 A.M - 12 P.M.
& by appointment

This course is about the role of the public in the maintenance of democratic politics in the United States. Debates over the importance of citizen involvement in government can be traced to the constitutional founding of the country, and persist in various forms in contemporary debates about politics. We will consider how well people meet the demands of citizenship and the explanations for why people engage and participate in politics. We will also study how lessons from this kind of empirical research inform normative goals of promoting civic competence and civic engagement. Finally, we will also spend time exploring whether civic engagement is necessary to maintain representative democracy.

course outline

- We begin by considering theories of citizenship and democracy, and the extent to which the maintenance of democracy depends on the actions and involvement of individual citizens.
- We then turn to the capacities of citizens in the United States, and the degree to which people possess both the motivation and resources to engage in politics. We will consider patterns of knowledge and preferences among the public and the explanations for these differences.
- Next, we explore patterns of political engagement, including how and why people participate in politics and in their communities.
- In the fourth section, we investigate various threats to citizen competence, from inequalities in citizen participation to elite manipulation to the influence of the news media.
- Finally, we investigate the role of institutions and environments in promoting civic competence and engagement.

WebCT is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at webct.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

about the readings for the course

This class will follow a seminar format, with more focus on discussion than lecture. Each week we will address one topic related to civic engagement. While some class sessions will be devoted to lecture, most class sessions will be spent discussing that week's topic. Thus keeping up with the assigned readings is an essential part of the class. Many of the readings come from academic journals, and often can be challenging given their level of detail and complexity. When you have questions about what the authors mean or how a passage should be understood, you are encouraged to bring these to class.

textbooks and reading assignments

- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Longman.
- A number of other journal articles and book chapters, which can be linked to from WebCT.
 - Some are accessible on JSTOR, an archive of social science journals: www.jstor.org
 - Some are available in the library's e-reserves: libraries.colorado.edu/screens/course reserves.html
 - Some are articles from journals available online through the library's e-journal archives.
 - *Note:* In some cases, you may be blocked from accessing online journals from off-campus computers. See information on the website of the University Library for instructions on remote access from off-site: ucblibraries.colorado.edu/research/remote.htm

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will also be responsible for the following:

participation, in-class assignments, and quizzes (worth 20% of your final grade)

This is a critical thinking course, so your frequent attendance and active participation is essential. Part of this will include keeping up with the readings. We will have short quizzes on the readings most weeks. Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade. We will also have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade.

short paper on citizenship (worth 5% of your final grade)

This paper will be due early in the semester, and details are discussed in a separate handout.

discussion questions (worth 10% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will select three topics from the syllabus for which you would like to prepare a set of questions for class discussion. You should prepare six to eight questions and e-mail these to wolakj@colorado.edu by Tuesday at noon. Additional details and suggestions on preparing questions are elaborated on a separate handout.

three short papers (each worth 5% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will select three additional topics from the syllabus (that differ from those for which you prepare discussion questions), and respond to the readings for that week in a two to three page essay. Papers should not be summaries of the readings, but should instead analyze and discuss more critically the issues at hand. Response papers are due at the beginning of class on the Wednesday we discuss that topic. Additional guidelines are detailed in a separate handout.

research project (worth 30% of your final grade)

More details about this assignment will be forthcoming later in the semester, but the central project for this course will be to develop a proposal on how to improve an aspect of civic competence.

midterm and final exam (each worth 10% of your final grade)

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).

class schedule

1. An introduction to political science, citizenship, and democracy

Monday, August 28	First class
Wednesday, August 30	How to read and analyze political science research
Friday, September 1	Writing day. Work on paper assignment. Class does not meet.
Monday, September 4	Labor Day. Class does not meet.
Wednesday, September 6	Paper assignment due.
Friday, September 8	What does it mean to be a “good citizen”? Conover, Pamela Johnston, Ivor M. Crewe, and Donald D. Searing. 1991. “The Nature of Citizenship in the United States and Great Britain: Empirical Comments on Theoretical Themes.” <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 53(3):800-832.

Citizen capacities and motivation

2. Political knowledge

What do people know about politics and why does it matter?

Monday, September 11 – Friday, September 15

- Schudson, Michael. 2000. “America's Ignorant Voters.” *The Wilson Quarterly* 24(2):16-23.
- Nie, Norman H., Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry. 1996. *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2.
- Gordon, Stacy B., and Gary M. Segura. 1997. “Cross-National Variation in the Political Sophistication of Individuals: Capability or Choice?” *The Journal of Politics* 59(1):126-147.

3. Ideological reasoning

How do people organize their beliefs?

Monday, September 18 – Friday, September 22

- Lane, Robert E. 1959. “The Fear of Equality.” *American Political Science Review* 53:35–51.
- Jennings, M. Kent. 1992. “Ideological Thinking among Mass Publics and Political Elites.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56:419-41.
- Green, Donald Philip, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Shickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 2.

4. Party polarization

How divided is the American public? What are the consequences?

Monday, September 25 – Friday, September 29

- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Longman.

5. Trust in government

What do people dislike about government? What are the consequences for public negativity about government?

Monday, October 2 – Friday, October 6

- Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Chapters 4-6.

Translating attitudes into political action

6. Social networks and political discussion

The importance of political discussion. The pros and cons of deliberation.

Monday, October 9 – Friday, October 13

- Barabas, Jason. 2004. "How Deliberation Affects Policy Opinions." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 703-716.
- Sanders, Lynn M. 1997. "Against Deliberation." *Political Theory* 25(3):347-376.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2002. "On a Danger of Deliberative Democracy." *Daedalus* 131(4):120-124.

Midterm exam

Friday, October 13

7. Why people participate

Why do people vote? Why do they volunteer for campaign activities?

Monday, October 16 – Friday, October 20

- Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, and Norman H. Nie. 1993. "Citizen Activity: Who Participates? What Do They Say?" *American Political Science Review* 87: 303-318.
- Highton, Benjamin, and Raymond Wolfinger. 2001. "The First Seven Years of the Political Life Cycle." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:202-209.
- Bryan, Frank M. 1999. "Direct Democracy and Civic Competence: The Case of the Town Meeting." In Stephen Elkin and Karol Edwards Soltan, eds. *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

8. Social capital and its consequences

Why do people participate in their communities? Social capital, civic culture, and the consequences.

Monday, October 23 – Friday, October 27

- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapters 1, 3, 8, 10, and 15.

Threats to civic competence

9. Inequalities in participation

How does knowledge and engagement differ according to class, gender, race, and other individual differences?

Monday, October 30 – Friday, November 3

- Burns, Nancy, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 1997. "The Public Consequences of Private Inequality: Family Life and Citizen Participation." *American Political Science Review* 91: 373-389.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, and Norman H. Nie. 1993. "Race, Ethnicity and Political Resources: Participation in the United States." *British Journal of Political Science* 23:453-497.
- Verba, Sidney. 2003. "Would the Dream of Political Equality Turn Out To Be a Nightmare?" *Perspectives on Politics* 1(4):663-680.

10. Campaigns

Do campaigns educate citizens? Do negative ads demobilize voters?

Monday, November 6 – Friday, November 10

- Bartels, Larry M. 2000. "Campaign Quality: Standards for Evaluation, Benchmarks for Reform." In Larry M. Bartels and Lynn Vavreck, eds. *Campaign Reform: Insights and Evidence* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (p. 1-61)
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88:829-838.

11. Media and civic journalism

What is the role of the media in providing political information?

Monday, November 13 – Friday, November 17

- Neuman, W. Russell, Marion Just, and Ann Crigler. 1992. *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 2, 5, and 6.
- Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577-592.

12. Manipulation

Do politicians lead public opinion, or follow? How vulnerable is the public to persuasive appeals?

Monday, November 27 – Friday, December 1

- McGraw, Kathleen M. 2002. "Manipulating Public Opinion." In Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Understanding Public Opinion* (2nd edition). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, and Kenneth W. Shotts. 2004. "The Conditional Nature of Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 48:690-706.

Role of institutions in civic competence

13. Knowledge and decision-making

What are the ways to promote political learning? How can informed decision-making be facilitated?

Monday, December 4 – Friday, December 8

- Graber, Doris A. 1994. "Why Voters Fail Information Tests: Can the Hurdles Be Overcome?" *Political Communication* 11:331-346.
- Lupia, Arthur. 2004. "Can Political Institutions Increase Citizens' Competence? Findings from a Formal Model and Two Experiments." In Irwin Morris, Joe A. Oppenheimer, and Karol Soltan, eds. *Politics from Anarchy to Democracy: Rational Choice in Political Science* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kuklinski, James H., and Paul J. Quirk. 2000. "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion." In Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

14. Engagement and participation

What are the ways to encourage political action and electoral participation?

Monday, December 11 – Friday, December 15

- Lijphart, Arend. 1997. "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma." *American Political Science Review* 91:1-14.
- Mettler, Suzanne. 2002. "Bringing the State Back in to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans." *American Political Science Review* 96(2):351-365.
- Finkel, Steven E. 2002. "Civic Education and the Mobilization of Participation in Developing Democracies." *Journal of Politics* 64: 994-1020.

Final exam

Wednesday, December 20, 1:30-4 p.m.