

Government 402: Political Opinion in the U.S.

American University, Spring 2025

Prof. Elizabeth Suhay (suhay@american.edu)

Monday, 5:30 – 8:00, Spring Valley Building 169 M

Office hours: Mondays, 3:00 – 5:00 (Kerwin Hall 212) and by appointment

Course Description

What does the U.S. public think about government and politics, and why? In this course, students will read contemporary scholarly works on U.S. political opinion. The course will cover debates over voter decision-making and competence, the causes and effects of partisan identification, the nature of ideology, various aspects of political polarization, the political relevance of social identity groups, and more. Students will complete several short papers as well as an original research paper on U.S. political opinion. Students who enroll in this course should be familiar with statistical analysis.

Learning Outcomes

This course satisfies the learning outcomes required of an AU Core Capstone. Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Build on knowledge, skills, or dispositions learned or developed at AU in a new context
2. Identify and execute a significant project that addresses a substantive political concern
3. Articulate the knowledge, skills, or dispositions gained during their undergraduate education or used in the project

In addition, at the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

1. Characterize the political opinions of the American public
2. Describe the factors thought to shape political opinion
4. Understand and distinguish multiple methods for studying public opinion
6. Make an argument about U.S. political opinion supported by original data analysis

Academic Integrity

All students are required to follow the University's Academic Integrity Code. *Plagiarism, which includes the unacknowledged submission of AI generated text in assignments, is a violation of academic integrity.* If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the standards and requirements of the University's Academic Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct will not be tolerated and will be reported appropriately. You can find more information about the University's Academic Integrity Code here:

<https://www.american.edu/policies/students/upload/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Assignments

In-class reflections 10%

Students will complete an in-class, written reflection in class each week. (Students can miss one reflection without penalty.) These are graded pass/fail.

The reflections will respond to questions such as:

- What are the author's main arguments in the work you read for this week?
- What evidence does the author provide to support their arguments?
- What is your evaluation of the quality of the author's arguments and evidence?
- What especially resonated with you or seemed especially important in this text?
- What questions do you have about the readings?

Essays 30%

Students will complete two essays on the assigned readings. Essays should be 1,500-2,000 words. Each is worth 15% of the student's grade.

Final Capstone project 50%

Students will complete an original research paper. The paper will be completed in stages: topic/research question, research proposal (10%), summary slide presentation (10%), and final draft (30%). Page length is at least 20 pages (including Works Cited). Papers are due May 5 by midnight.

Participation 10%

The success of this seminar depends on your preparation. Please read assigned readings in their entirety before each class and record notes on authors' main points and your reflections. Consider each publication's strengths, weaknesses, implications, and any questions you have about it. Students' participation will be graded according to quantity and quality of participation, with quality reflecting preparation and constructive engagement with readings, classmates' ideas, and activities. Each student is permitted one unexcused absence without penalty. Additional absences and/or repeatedly arriving late will negatively affect the participation grade.

Unless required for a class activity, students should not use cell phones or computers during class. Please speak with me if you feel you need an exemption from this policy.

Required Books (either purchase or obtain via Bender Library reserves)

- Patrick Ruffini. 2023. *Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP*. Simon & Schuster
- Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins. 2024. *Polarized by Degrees: How the Diploma Divide and the Culture War Transformed American Politics*. Cambridge.
- Jennifer Chudy. 2024. *Some White Folks: The Interracial Politics of Sympathy, Suffering, and Solidarity*. Chicago.
- Stephanie Ternullo. 2024. *How the Heartland Went Red: Why Local Forces Matter in an Age of Nationalized Politics*. Princeton.
- Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2024. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. The New Press.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Monday, January 13

Lecture: Overview of the field of public opinion

UNIT 1: The Party Coalitions & Partisan Polarization

Week 2: Monday, January 20

MLK Day – no class

Reading: Patrick Ruffini. 2023. *Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP*. Simon & Schuster

- Chapter 1: Party of the People (pp. 1-27)
- Chapter 2: The Cosmopolitan Trap (pp. 29-49)
- Chapter 3: The Majority That Failed (pp. 51-67)
- Chapter 4: The Working-Class Majority (pp. 69-89)

Homework due Tuesday by 5 pm

Week 3: Monday, January 27

Reading due: Patrick Ruffini. 2023. *Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP*. Simon & Schuster

- Chapter 5: The Political Center of Gravity (pp. 91-119)
- Chapter 6: The New American Mainstream (pp. 121-147)
- Chapter 7: Hardhat Conservatives (pp. 149-170)
- Chapter 8: The 2020 Surge (pp. 171-193)

Lecture & activity: Survey methodology, part 1 – history of surveys & representativeness

Week 4: Monday, February 3

Reading due: Patrick Ruffini. 2023. *Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP*. Simon & Schuster

- Chapter 9: Realignment on the Rio Grande (pp. 195-213)
- Chapter 10: Black Politics (pp. 215-239)
- Chapter 11: The Multiracial Populist Future (pp. 241-271)
- About the numbers (pp. 277-279)

Lecture & activity: Survey methodology, part 2 – conceptualization & measurement

Week 5: Monday, February 10

Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins. 2024. *Polarized by Degrees: How the Diploma Divide and the Culture War Transformed American Politics*. Cambridge.

- Chapter 1: Introduction: Changing Parties in a Changing World (pp. 1-32)
- Chapter 2: How Educated Liberals Are Winning the Culture War (pp. 33-75)

Lecture & activity: Alternative methods for studying public opinion

Topic/research question due in class

Week 6: Monday, February 17

Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins. 2024. *Polarized by Degrees: How the Diploma Divide and the Culture War Transformed American Politics*. Cambridge.

- Chapter 3: “Hope and Change” Meets “Make America Great Again” (pp. 76-120)
- Chapter 4: The Rise of the Diploma Divide in American Elections (pp. 121-161)
- Chapter 5: Trust the Institutions, or Burn Them Down? (pp. 162-203)

Lecture & activity: How to create a research design; data resources

Week 7: Monday, February 24

Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins. 2024. *Polarized by Degrees: How the Diploma Divide and the Culture War Transformed American Politics*. Cambridge.

- Chapter 6: Fighting “Woke Capitalism”: The Republican Rebellion against Corporate America (pp. 204-240)
- Chapter 7: Are Policymakers Solving Problems or Imposing Values? (pp. 241-278)
- Chapter 8: Conclusion: Why Everything Is about Politics Now, and Politics Is about Everything (pp. 279-303)

Lecture & activity: Downloading & preparing data for analysis

Essay 1 due Friday by midnight

Week 8: Monday, March 3

Research design workshop – bring research design ideas to class

Lecture & activity: Data analysis refresher

Research design due Friday by midnight

Week 9: Monday, March 10

Spring Break

Unit 2: Race & Place in American Politics

Week 10: Monday, March 17

Jennifer Chudy. 2024. *Some White Folks: The Interracial Politics of Sympathy, Suffering, and Solidarity*. Chicago.

- Chapter 1: Introduction: An Underexplored Force in American Politics (pp. 1-13)
- Chapter 2: What is Racial Sympathy? (pp. 14-35)
- Chapter 3: Measuring Racial Sympathy (pp. 36-68)
- Chapter 4: Who Are Racially Sympathetic White People? (pp. 69-98)

Research workshop

Week 11: Monday, March 24

Jennifer Chudy. 2024. *Some White Folks: The Interracial Politics of Sympathy, Suffering, and Solidarity*. Chicago.

- Chapter 5: Public Opinion on Redistributive Policies (pp. 99-119)
- Chapter 6: Public Opinion on the Criminal Legal System (pp. 120-140)
- Chapter 7: Does Sympathy Lead to Action (pp. 141-159)
- Chapter 8: Action and Perceptions of Efficacy (pp. 160-179)
- Chapter 9: Racial Sympathy in the Twenty-First Century (pp. 180-195)

Research workshop

Week 12: Monday, March 31

Stephanie Ternullo. 2024. *How the Heartland Went Red: Why Local Forces Matter in an Age of Nationalized Politics*. Princeton.

- Introduction (pp. 1-28)
- Chapter 1: The Uneven Geography of Heartland Politics: The Local Ramifications of Political Transformation from the New Deal to Trump (pp. 31-55)
- Chapter 2: Local Organizations and the Shape of Problem-Solving in Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend (pp. 56-80)
- Chapter 3: How Local Contexts Produce (Anti)-Statism in Motorville and Lutherton (pp. 83-105)

Lecture & activity: How to create a research slide presentation

Week 13: Monday, April 7

Stephanie Ternullo. 2024. *How the Heartland Went Red: Why Local Forces Matter in an Age of Nationalized Politics*. Princeton.

- Chapter 4: From Place to Partisan Identity in Motorville and Lutherton (pp. 106-132)
- Chapter 5: Politics in a Dying Place: Organizational Instability and Postindustrial Populism in Gravesend (pp. 133-154)
- Chapter 6: Local Contexts amid National Crisis: Economic Downturn in Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend (pp. 157-174)
- Chapter 7: The End of Place? How the Nationalization of Politics Shapes Place-Based Partisanship (pp. 175-189)
- Conclusion: The Future of Heartland Politics (pp. 190-199)

Slide presentations

Week 14: Monday, April 14

Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2024. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. The New Press.

- PART ONE: THE MARCH
 - Chapter 1: A Polite Voice (pp. 3-14)
 - Chapter 2: “We’re Good People Here” (pp. 15-22)
 - Chapter 3: The Pride Paradox (pp. 23-42)
 - Chapter 4: “Come to Help Y’all Out” (pp. 43-59)
 - Chapter 5: Insiders, Outsiders (pp. 61-78)

Slide presentations

Week 15: Monday, April 21

Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2024. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. The New Press.

- PART TWO: FACES IN THE CROWD
 - Chapter 6: Bootstrap Pride (pp. 81-95)
 - Chapter 7: Outlaw Pride (pp. 97-113)
 - Chapter 8: Survivor’s Pride: Hood and Holler (pp. 115-133)
 - Chapter 9: “I Could Have Become a White Nationalist” (pp. 135-146)
 - Chapter 10: At the Grave’s Edge (pp. 147-167)

Slide presentations

Monday, April 28: *Last day of class*

Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2024. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. The New Press.

- PART THREE: THE ROLL OF THUNDER
 - Chapter 11: Trial Run (pp. 171-180)
 - Chapter 12: Liquid Politics (pp. 181-191)
 - Chapter 13: Lightening in a Jar (pp. 193-226)
 - Chapter 14: Pride on a Dangerous Ride (pp. 227-240)
 - Chapter 15: An Empathy Bridge (pp. 241-250)
 - Chapter 16: Overburden (pp. 251-262)
 - Goodbyes (pp. 263-266)

Slide presentations

Essay 2 due Friday by midnight

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS POLICIES & SUPPORT

Academic Support and Access Center

The Academic Support and Access Center supports the academic development and educational goals of all American University students and is committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities within the university's diverse community.

Location: Butler Pavilion 300, 202-885-3360, asac@american.edu

Hours: Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm

Website: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/>

Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct

American University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy or parenting, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under applicable federal and local laws and regulations (collectively "Protected Bases") in its programs and activities. The University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and stalking.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the:

Assistant Vice President for Equity and Title IX Officer, Office of Equity and Title IX

Phone: 202-885-8080

Email: TitleIX@american.edu for complaints and reports for sexual misconduct; and equityoffice@american.edu for complaints and reports for other discrimination.

- Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, staff in the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.
- For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact contact AU's [Wellbeing Center](#).

Emergencies

In an emergency, AU will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail or Canvas, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (<http://www.american.edu/emergency/>) and the AU information line at 202-885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.