

POLS 247 – Parties, Elections, and Political Behavior
Fall 2025

Instructor: Prof. Amy Meli

Class: Tuesday/Thursday, 1:10 – 2:40pm

Location: 203 Pleasants Hall

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Office Location: 104 Pleasants Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. – noon

Course Overview

Why do people think, vote, and engage the way they do—and how do elections turn those choices into political power? This course explores the forces that shape American political behavior and elections, from ideology and identity to media, money, and party politics.

In the first half of this course, we'll examine what drives public opinion and political participation—and why some voices carry more weight than others. In the second, we'll turn to the mechanics of U.S. elections, looking at how candidates are chosen, campaigns are run, and votes are counted.

Through readings, discussions, and hands-on projects, you'll connect big ideas to current events, culminating in a deep-dive “postmortem” analysis of the 2025 Virginia gubernatorial election. By semester's end, you'll have the tools to analyze political behavior, evaluate the health of democratic representation, and engage in evidence-based debates about American politics.

Course Objectives

- Students will be able to identify key drivers of political behavior, including ideology, partisanship, social identity, race, ethnicity, gender, and political elites. In their analysis, students will examine how these drivers contribute to or detract from political pluralism.
- Students will be able to describe the drivers of political participation and how those drivers lead some groups to have more political representation than others. In conducting this analysis, students will wrestle with the ways that differences in involvement lead to differences in political power.
- Students will be able to analyze the ways institutional factors, including political party support, the media, campaign finance, and candidate recruitment/selection influences elections. In doing this, students will be able to discuss the ways these institutions reflect democratic ideals of pluralism and representation.

Required Readings and Other Course Materials

All readings will be posted on the course page.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings or other course materials that are assigned for that day. Each day in class, we will spend time discussing the assigned readings. Your responsibility is to (1) come to class having completed the reading (2) bring with you one reaction to the day's assigned reading. Your reaction could be a concept you found especially interesting, a topic for class discussion related to the reading, or a clarifying question. Be ready to discuss your reaction in class.

Course Assignments

Attendance and Participation – 10% of final grade

Participation grades include attendance, engagement, and participation in class. Students should complete assigned reading before class, be active participants in class discussions/work, be attentive, and ask/respond to questions. This means providing quality contributions in class and participating in class/group discussions.

In-Class Assignments – 20% of final grade

Students will participate in class activities and complete assignments in class that will help reinforce class discussions, lectures, and course materials. Assignments will include group activities and individual written reflections.

Drivers of Political Behavior Oral Presentation – 10% of final grade

Students will identify an example of one of the key drivers of political behavior as covered in the media. In class, students will present this example and describe how the driver influences public opinion, polarization, voting, or non-voting political activities.

Short Papers – 30% of final grade

Students will write two original, 3-4 page papers. The first will be related to ideology and partisanship and the second will be related to political participation. In the papers, students will synthesize concepts covered in class and in the course materials and apply them to real world examples from politics. Additional details about each of the papers will be provided during the semester.

Gubernatorial Campaign Postmortem – 30% of final grade

During the final two sessions of class, students will present a detailed “post-mortem” account of the 2025 Virginia gubernatorial election. In the presentation, students will select three concepts discussed in class and discuss how those elements influenced the outcome of the election. Prior to the presentation, students will submit an outline of their presentation. The instructor will review and provide comments on the presentation's structure and content so that students may make revisions in advance of their final presentation.

Tentative Course Schedule

Day	Topic	Readings Due
Thursday, 9/4	Introduction	None
Tuesday, 9/9	UNIT 1: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR What is public opinion?	Zaller 1992 (Chapter 2) (available in ebook at library)
Thursday, 9/11	Measuring public opinion	Grossman and Wlezien 2024 (PDF of paper uploaded to Moodle)
Tuesday, 9/16	Political decision-making	This Medium article
Thursday, 9/18	Ideology	Ellis and Stimson 2012 (Chapters 1 and 5) (available in ebook at library)
Tuesday, 9/23	Partisanship	Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002 (Chapter 1) (available in ebook at library)
Thursday, 9/25	Racial attitudes and public opinion	Dawson 2020 Chapter 1 and Hutchings and Valentino 2004 (both available electronically at library)
Tuesday, 9/30	Polarization	Listen to this podcast
Thursday, 10/2	Framing	Lakoff 2014 (Chapter 1) (scanned chapter on Moodle)
Tuesday, 10/7	Priming	Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. (PDF of article available on Moodle)
Thursday, 10/9	Who participates in politics?	Verba Scholzman and Brady 1995 (Chapters 1 and 2) (PDF of chapter available on Moodle) Rational Choice Video
Tuesday, 10/14	Non-voting participation	Hersh 2021
Thursday, 10/16	Fall break - NO CLASS	None
Tuesday, 10/21	Voter turnout	Pew 2024 Voter Turnout Study
Thursday, 10/23	UNIT 2: ELECTIONS How elections work in the U.S.	Sides et al 2023 (Chapter 2) (PDF of Chapter available on Moodle)
Tuesday, 10/28	Elections and representation	Achen and Bartels 2016 (Chapter 1) - available in ebook at library
Thursday, 10/30	Candidate selection	Why Party Primaries Must Go
Tuesday, 11/4	Who runs for office?	Why You Should Run for Office
Thursday, 11/6	Parties and elections	Political Parties and American Democracy (Exec Summary, Preface, and Ch 1)
Tuesday, 11/11	The media and elections	Media influence on politics: 7 election trends in 2024
Thursday, 11/13	Campaign finance	Dwyre and Kolodny 2024 (Chapter 1)
Tuesday, 11/18	Political advertising	Coppock, Hill, and Vavreck 2020
Thursday, 11/20	Polling and election forecasting	Silver 2020 Tufekci 2020
Tuesday, 12/2	Access to voting	Rothschild et al. 2024 Lo Wang 2024
Thursday, 12/4	Election administration	Meli at al. 2024 Brennan Center for Justice 2018
Tuesday, 12/9	Oral presentations	None

Thursday, 12/11	Oral presentations	None

Accessing Required Course Texts

If you are unable to obtain the required texts for this course, please review the course texts checklist for alternative options.

Academic Support and Tutoring

Hollins faculty and staff are committed to providing all students with the academic support they need. Many types of learning support are available inside and outside of class. You are always welcome to talk with me or with your academic advisor if you are comfortable doing so. Other options include success coaches and peer tutors, both available in the library on the first floor. Success Coaches provide guidance on both academic and non-academic matters, helping you develop strategies to achieve your goals. You can schedule an appointment using this link or drop in during business hours. Working with a peer tutor is a great way to maximize your learning and your success in writing, math, and assignments for other subjects. You can easily schedule an appointment at Hollins University Tutoring or drop in during open hours.

The Green | An Integrative Learning Commons, located on the first floor of the library, is where you'll find success coaches, peer tutors, and additional resources: Career and Life Design; the Global Learning Hub; Student Support Offices for HU Connect, HOPE Scholars, and International Student Engagement (ISE) Programs. The Green includes the Center for Learning Excellence (CLE), which houses the peer tutors and other learning supports. Other offices for Student Success, Well-being, and Belonging are located on the second and third floors of the library. These include Student Accessibility Services, the Student Success Coordinator, and the Chief Title IX Officer.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Hollins affirms that students are entitled to an equitable learning environment that fosters their agency, develops their capacity for self-advocacy, and is free of unfair and exclusionary practices. For accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services at sas@hollins.edu, or find more information and submit an online inquiry on the Learning Accommodations page. Student Accessibility Services works with students to develop individualized support services, including reasonable accommodations that facilitate access to learning, living, and other experiences at Hollins.

Mental Health and Wellness

Emotional and mental well-being is essential for academic success. I recognize that college students can experience mental health challenges that make learning difficult. You may be experiencing life stressors, such as increased anxiety, feeling down or overwhelmed, strained relationships, suffering a loss, or dealing with a personal struggle. If you have or a friend has difficulties that are interfering with your academic or personal success, please know that helpful, effective, and confidential resources are available at Hollins.

Available Resources Hollins University Health & Counseling Services at 540-362-6444 or hcs@hollins.edu. Appointments for face-to-face and video counseling are available. Health &

Counseling Services will assess and may refer students to other, off-campus providers based on your individual mental health needs.

University Chaplain: The Chaplain provides confidential spiritual care, pastoral counseling, and emotional support to students of all faith backgrounds and beliefs. The Chaplain can also assist you in connecting with on- and off-campus resources to help you navigate personal challenges.

Fall 2025 Counseling Hours

Note that Health and Counseling will be closed from 12:15-12:45 every Monday through Thursday to allow employees to have a break for lunch. If there is an emergency, students may call 540-362-6444 (Office) for assistance.

Title IX

Hollins University's Sexual Harassment Under Title IX Policy designates specific employees of the institution as "individuals with authority." These employees include the President; vice presidents; Housing and Residence Life staff (including Community Assistants); Campus Security staff; all employees within Student Success, Well-being, and Belonging (except for Health and Counseling staff and the University Chaplain); and Human Resources staff. In accordance with federal law, these employees are required to report information they receive regarding students who may have experienced sexual harassment, harassment, bullying, sex-and-gender-based harassment, sexual violence, dating/intimate partner violence, and stalking covered under Title IX to the university's Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Tiffany Hinton, at titleix@hollins.edu. This includes information shared with individuals with authority in any manner, including, but not limited to, in-person communications, electronic communications, and class assignments.

Sexual harassment under Title IX means conduct on the basis of sex (including gender identity and sexual misconduct) and sexual orientation that satisfies one or more of the following:

1. An employee of the university conditioning the provision of an aid, benefit, or service of the university on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct ("quid pro quo" or "this for that");
2. Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the recipient's education program or activity; or
3. Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking as defined by federal law.

Once an individual with authority reports a Title IX sexual harassment situation to the Title IX Coordinator, the Title IX Coordinator is then legally required to contact students with resources and options and determine next steps.

Information regarding sexual harassment, bullying, gender-based harassment, sexual violence, dating/intimate partner violence, and stalking is confidential to the fullest extent possible.

Additional information regarding Hollins University's Title IX policy, including resources, can be found at <https://www.hollins.edu/about-hollins/commitment-to-dei/harassment-grievance-processes-including-title-ix/>.

Hollins Honor Code

The basis of life at Hollins is honor and trust. The Honor Code, which embodies these ideals, applies to and must be upheld by all members of the Hollins community. Students, in a symbolic commitment to live by the Code, sign an Honor Pledge during their first six weeks at Hollins.

Honor Code Pledge

I pledge to conduct myself in an honorable and trustworthy manner at Hollins University by not lying, stealing, or cheating. I understand that my responsibilities to the Honor System are as follows when an honor offense occurs. I will:

a. report myself to the Honor Court; and/or b. ask another to report herself or himself for an offense; and/or c. report the violation to the Honor Court if the student does not do so.

I, _____, place myself under the Honor System of Hollins University. I understand that a plea of ignorance will not excuse me in the matter. I also understand that I am subject to prosecution should I fail to report a violation.

Please remember that all work submitted for assignments must be your own and must include the appropriate citation of sources. Cheating and plagiarism are violations of the Hollins Honor Code (see the 2025-2026 Student Handbook). This includes submission of material from published work and material found on the internet without sufficient citation, submission of papers for purchase, and/or the use of ChatGPT and other AI-generated text without citation. Students who engage in cheating or plagiarism will be directed to the Honor Court. As your professor, I will strive to make clear my expectations for each assignment, including citations. If you are ever in doubt about appropriate citation for your sources, I am here to help you! Please make an appointment with me to discuss this further.

Sample Citation (adapted for MLA citation style with Rebecca Seipp) ChatGPT. "insert your prompt here." OpenAI, <https://openai.com>. Accessed on 3 February 2025.