This course is about the ways in which people form and act on their political preferences. We start with utility theory and spatial models of choice. We then turn to basic empirical criticisms of this literature, many of which stem from psychological research on heuristics and cues. In the second half of the course, we turn to bread-and-butter American politics topics: partisanship, social influences on political behavior, models of election outcomes, and more.

The readings are usually short, but they take time. Some have a substantial mathematical or statistical component. Outside of class, you should try to work through these parts of the readings for yourself outside of class. In other words, I want you to wrestle with the mathematical and statistical arguments that you encounter in the readings.

Assignments and Grades
Each student must write two responses, each 2-3 pages long and accounting for 10% of the overall grade. Discussion accounts for 30% of the final grade. A final paper, no more than 15 pages long, accounts for 50% of the final grade.

Perfect attendance does not ensure that you will get a satisfactory discussion grade. If you always attend class but rarely speak, or if you speak regularly in ways that suggest that you haven’t thought about the readings, you will receive a low discussion grade—perhaps an F. In the
past, most discussion grades have been in the B range, and C grades have sometimes been more common than A grades.

There is no formal penalty for missing a class. But you cannot contribute to class discussion if you do not attend, so it will be hard to get a high discussion grade if you miss more than a few classes.

DISCUSSION
Discussion will be based heavily on the readings.

You are required to lead the first part of discussion in two different classes. In each of these classes, you should come prepared to speak about the assigned reading for 15 minutes at the beginning of class. It may make sense to begin with a brief overview of the assigned reading, but as with the reading responses, the emphasis should be on critique rather than summary. (As a rule of thumb, spend no more than 90 seconds summarizing any particular reading.) The discussion grade is based on discussion throughout the semester, but I will weight these presentations heavily as I determine the discussion grade.

In some weeks, more than one student may be assigned to discuss. In those cases, each student must be prepared to talk for 15 minutes. Students should also coordinate with each other to ensure that their comments don’t overlap much.

Students who are going to present in a given class must post at least one page of notes on their presentations to the “Discussions” section of the Canvas site. These notes will not be graded, but they must be posted at least 24 hours before the start of class.

READING RESPONSES
Each student must write two reading responses. These responses should be 2-3 pages long. They should critique—not summarize—at least one of the assigned readings. They must pertain chiefly to the current week’s reading. They may focus on a small part of the assigned reading. I encourage you to talk about the readings with each other, but each of you should write responses on your own.

Whenever you refer to a specific passage or claim in the assigned readings, be sure to mention the relevant page numbers. You can do this briefly and informally: “Smith says X (page 92).” You must cite the page numbers in the printed text, not the page numbers of the PDF file or any other page numbers.

Responses are due 24 hours before the beginning of class. They should be posted in the appropriate thread of the “Discussions” section of the course web site—not sent by e-mail.

You must submit your first response by May 8th. You may turn in only one response per week. I will not grant deadline extensions for the reading responses. Remember, you need to write only two of them.
By early June, I expect that I will have graded and returned only those responses that you wrote by early May.

See the “Format of Assignments” section of this syllabus for further instructions. If you fail to follow those formatting instructions, I will automatically lower your grade: an A will become an A−, a B will become a B−, and so on.

FINAL PAPER
Your final paper must trace the progress of an idea in political science. Start by identifying a question that interests you—preferably one that relates to the assigned reading. Then find copies of the *American Political Science Review* that were published in the 1950s, either through the library or through JSTOR. Look at the article titles and abstracts until you find an article that covers your topic. (You may need to look well into the decade.) Do the same thing for the next five decades. At the end of this stage, you will have selected one article from each decade.

Next, write one or two paragraphs for yourself about each article. What is the main question? What is the theory? To what previous work do they refer? What are the data? What methods did the authors use? What are their main conclusions? Answer these questions for each article, bearing in mind that your goal is to trace the progress of a question over six decades of research.

Your paper should start with a paragraph that introduces the question and previews the way that the research unfolds. The concluding paragraph should summarize: was progress regular or staccato? Were there big moments in which large advances were made? Within the discipline, were there disagreements about how the question should be approached? In answering these questions, your aim should be to help me understand how we got from the 1950s to where we are now.

Be sure to include the title of each article in the body of your paper.

The paper should be no more than 15 pages long, not counting a standalone list of references on the last page. It is due 900am on June 14th. Please meet me before May 14th to discuss potential topics: I don’t want you to take on topics that are too big. Upload the paper through the “Assignments” section of the Canvas site and slip hard copy under the door of my office. Do not send a copy by e-mail.

*I will not reply to email about the final paper that is sent after June 3rd* unless the questions are about formatting or are otherwise purely procedural. Please plan accordingly.

WRITING FOR ME
I’ve posted a memo that sets forth rules and guidelines to follow when you write papers in my courses. Please read every word, including every item in the long list at the end of the memo. If there is something in the memo that you don’t understand, just ask me about it.
If you don’t follow the rules and guidelines—and you can’t explain why—you will do poorly in this course.

FORMAT OF ASSIGNMENTS
All assignments must be double-spaced and set in a 12-to-13-point font. The font must be serifed; this rules out Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, and other sans-serif fonts. The font must not be monospaced; this rules out, e.g., Courier. Margins must be between 1” and 1.33” on each side.

Your name, the date of submission, and “PLSC 390: Political Behavior,” should appear in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of every assignment. For reading responses, also include the name of the unit as given in this syllabus (e.g., “Tolerance”). The upper right-hand corner of every subsequent page should bear your last name, the page number, and “PLSC 390: Reading Response” or “PLSC 390: Final Paper.”

MAPPING BETWEEN NUMBERS AND LETTER GRADES
All of the grades that you receive in this course will be letter grades, e.g., A, B+. To compute an average grade for the semester that I can report to the Registrar’s Office, I will translate those letter grades into numbers, average the numbers, and then translate the average back into a letter grade. This is the mapping between letter grades and numbers: below 60 = F, 60 to 63 = D−, 63 to 67 = D, 67 to 70 = D+, 70 to 73 = C−, 73 to 77 = C, 77 to 80 = C+, 80 to 83 = B−, 83 to 87 = B, 87 to 90 = B+, 90 to 93 = A−, 93 and above = A.

GRADES WILL NOT BE ROUNDED UP
Grades will not be rounded up. For example, a final grade of 92.9 will be reported to the Registrar as an A–.

Readings
Required readings are marked with an asterisk. The other readings in the syllabus are recommended but not required.

I expect to make small changes to the reading list throughout the term. Whenever I make changes especially worth noting, I’ll send an announcement via email.

FINDING THE READINGS
There is no packet of course readings, and you should print or acquire the readings yourself. Most are available online, either from URLs that are given in this syllabus or from the course website.
If there is no URL in the syllabus and the course website doesn’t have the article, please search for it online. You are responsible for locating every one of the assigned readings.

I find most of the course readings (except those available through Canvas) by searching Google Scholar. To use it effectively, you may need to use an on-campus computer or to connect through the Northwestern VPN. If you don’t know what a VPN is, see http://www.it.northwestern.edu/oncampus/vpn/.

RECOMMENDED READINGS
Almost all of my recommendations are topic-specific, and they therefore appear below, in the sections on specific topics. But I also recommend two general texts to you:


BACKGROUND READINGS IN STATISTICS
There is no statistics prerequisite, but many of the assigned articles use simple statistics. If you want to better understand the statistical methods that you encounter in the articles, I recommend:


Freedman, David A. 2009. Statistical Models: Theory and Practice. Revised ed. New York: Cambridge University Press. This is better than Statistics but also more advanced. Chapters 1-5 are excellent for self-study if you do the exercises.
Office Hours

Office hours will take place on the times specified at https://www.slotted.co/2018spring. They will be held at my office: Scott Hall 304. You do not need to make an appointment in advance, but I prefer that you do. Making an appointment also reduces the probability that you will need to wait while I’m meeting with other students.

You cannot sign up for my office hours through Canvas. Instead, please make appointments through https://www.slotted.co/2018spring. When you make an appointment, please add a comment indicating what you would like to talk about when we meet.

If all office-hours slots are full—you can tell by checking the slotted.co site—I generally will not be able to meet with you during or immediately after office hours.
April 4 (Wed): Introduction


April 11 (Wed): Axioms about Choice; Utility; Uncertainty, Risk, and Time Preferences

*Tomz, Michael, and Robert P. van Houweling. 2009. “The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity.” *American Political Science Review* 103 (February): 83-98. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409090066](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409090066). In political science, we often think about what voters’ risk preferences imply for their preferences over candidates. E.g., should candidates be clear or vague about their positions? That is the focus of this article.


RECOMMENDED READINGS ABOUT CHOICE


Kreps, David M. 1988. *Notes on the Theory of Choice*. Boulder, CO: Westview. Informal and fast-paced. The print in my paperback copy is very blurry, and I suspect that this is a problem with all paperback copies of the book. The hardcover copies seem to be better.

Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.


RECOMMENDED READINGS ABOUT REVEALED PREFERENCES AND UTILITY FUNCTIONS


RECOMMENDED READINGS ABOUT UNCERTAINTY, RISK, AND TIME PREFERENCES


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.
April 18 (Wed): Political Sophistication, Nonattitudes, and “Information Shortcuts”

We’ll first consider political sophistication and nonattitudes. Then we’ll turn to the possibility that “source cues” can be used as “shortcuts” to help uninformed people act as they would if they were informed.

**POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AND NONATTITUDES**


* Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, Jr. 2008. “The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 102 (May): 215-32. [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003055408080210](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003055408080210). This is a difficult article. Most of the math is simple, but there is a lot of it. Try reading the article twice before lecture: read first to get the gist; the second time, try to work through the math.


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.


Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Still the most comprehensive treatment of what Americans know and don’t know about politics. And it is not as dated as you might think: this story doesn’t change much over time.

**CUES AS SHORTCUTS**

*Somin, Ilya. 1998. “Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal.” *Critical Review* 12 (4): 413-58. [http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a791282780~db=all](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a791282780~db=all). I recommend the entire article, but you are required to read only to page 431.*


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.
April 25 (Wed): Partisanship and Partisan Polarization in the Mass Public

We start with basic ideas about partisanship. We then turn to the idea that Americans are polarizing along partisan lines.

PARTISANSHIP


Hersh, Eitan D. 2015. *Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Especially Chapter 5. What can campaigns predict about you if they know your party registration, and how well can they predict it?


Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, and Ebonya Washington. 2010. “Party Affiliation, Partisanship, and Political Beliefs: A Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 104 (November): 720-44. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055410000407](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055410000407). Think about how to manipulate partisanship in an experiment. In this article, the authors show you how to do it rather simply.

Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapters 1, 2, and 8. Available from the course web site. The authors’ main argument is that party identification is very stable over time.


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.
PARTISAN POLARIZATION IN THE MASS PUBLIC


*Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. 2008. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” Annual Review of Political Science 11: 563-88. Read pages 574-82, focusing on the “Polarized Choices” and “Party Sorting” sections. Be sure that you understand the arguments in both sections or that you come to class with specific questions about them.


Of late, there has been particular interest in partisan polarization with respect to survey responses, especially responses to questions about factual beliefs. You may be interested in:


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.
May 2 (Wed): Family Influences, Socialization, and Education

FAMILY INFLUENCES, SOCIALIZATION, AND PUBLIC OPINION


EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

*Alesina, Alberto, and Edward L. Glaeser. 2004. *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe*. Oxford. Pages 204-206. There is an important idea in these three pages, and I will be asking you about it.

Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.


Merelman, Richard M. 1980. “Democratic Politics and the Culture of American Education.” *American Political Science Review* 74 (June): 319-32. This article is a work of political theory. Some of the ideas in it are radical. Some are ridiculous. Some are profound. There are short follow-ups to this article in the same issue of the APSR, but I don’t find them edifying.
May 9 (Wed): Media Effects


Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2006. “Media Bias and Reputation.” *Journal of Political Economy* 114 (2)

Bartels, Larry M. 1993. “Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure.” *American Political Science Review* 87 (June): 267-85. It’s very difficult, perhaps impossible, to learn a lot about media effects—that is, to learn with confidence—from survey data alone. I would never recommend that anyone try to do so. But in the past, many scholars did try. And of all the survey-only efforts, this one may be the best. It is certainly interesting and clever.


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.
Mutz, Diana C. 1998. *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*. New York: Cambridge University Press. The biggest idea here is that perceptions of broad social conditions—can be quite influential. And one comes by these “sociotropic” considerations largely through the media.


**May 16 (Wed): Participation**

“Participation” can take many forms: donating to a campaign, going to a rally, trying to persuade someone to vote for a particular candidate, and so on. But the lion’s share of the participation literature is about voter turnout. When you come to class, be prepared to tell me why. The answer is not in the readings.


Gentzkow, Matthew. 2006. “Television and Voter Turnout.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 71 (August): 931-72. This is a relatively difficult article. Unless you have already covered fixed-effects regression in one of your other courses, please do not focus on this article in your reading responses.


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.

**May 23 (Wed): Campaigns**

Many articles assigned in other units could also have been assigned in this one.


**May 30 (Wed): No Class**

**June 6 (Wed): Simple Models of Election Outcomes**


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.


Kayser, Mark Andreas, and Michael Peress. 2012. “Benchmarking across Borders: Electoral Accountability and the Necessity of Comparison.” American Political Science Review 106 (August): 661-84. In part, this is an argument that political scientists have been underestimating the effects of the economy on election outcomes.


Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required. All others are optional.