



POLS 3300: American Elections and How  
They Work  
Spring 2023  
TTh 2:00 PM – 3:20 PM  
Holden Hall | Room 00109



**Instructor Information**  
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Office Hours: TTh 11-  
12:30

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### Part I: Course Description

The aftermath of the 2020 election brought new attention to issues of election administration and the heated political rhetoric regarding whether different modes of voting give an advantage to one party over the other has dominated many a news cycle. In this course, we will cut through the rhetoric and discuss what objective research has to say about how, or whether, elections work in the United States. This course will provide a broad overview of the logistics, mechanics, rules, and systems of elections in the United States. We will discuss whether different modes of elections affect voter turnout, result in partisan advantage, diminish voter confidence in election integrity, and a variety of other electoral outcomes.

### Part II: Class Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Explain the historic origins and development of election administration in the United States
- Demonstrate knowledge of various modes of election administration and their affects, whether real or perceived, on voter turnout, experiences, and electoral outcomes
- Develop an appreciation for the role which state and local governments play in the administration of elections
- Critically examine the effects of electoral reforms on voter turnout, voter confidence, and electoral results
- Evaluate the role of public opinion, political rhetoric, and political parties in American elections

### Part III: Grading and Course Requirements

**Course Logistics and Expectations:** This is a lecture course, and course material will be delivered via readings, in-class lectures, and other types of media. The primary method of communication between the instructor and students will be via Announcements on [insert learning interface platform here], and your school email. Consequently, you will be expected to regularly check your university email address and the Announcements in [insert learning software interface here].

#### Final Course Grades Will Be Assigned as Follows:

Course Grade Scale	
A	100%-89.5%
B	79.5%-89.4%
C	69.5%-79.4%
D	59.5%-69.4%
F	<=59.4

#### Final Grades Will Be Calculated Based on the Following Components:

**Exam I (25%), Exam II (30%):** Content knowledge will be assessed via two short answer/essay exams. Exam I will cover material in Weeks 1-4. Exam II will cover material in Weeks 5-9.

**Discussion Board Assignments (20%):** I will post **weekly** discussion topics that will ask students to respond to prompts that relate the course readings to some real-life situation in American elections. Topics will be **posted on Monday and submissions must be completed by the following Sunday**. Students will be asked to post a brief response asserting an argument to the prompt, and then will respond to a certain number of other students in the discussion threads. Further instructions will be written in the prompts. **Note:** Though lively discussion is encouraged, and civil disagreement is an expected part of any academic discussion, these responses are to be kept polite and friendly. This course is to be a setting for academic, meritorious, and free flowing dialog concerning American elections. Derogatory comments made toward other students, the instructor, or other members of the school community will not be tolerated.

**GOTV PSA (25%):** One of the most difficult challenges of GOTV efforts is informing the public of the logistics of voting, especially if there have been recent changes in voting rules or the implementation of election administration. For the final assignment, you will participate in a group project in which you will be asked to create a GOTV PSA informing the public of how to participate in a particular mode of voting, utilizing your newfound knowledge from the class about how different modes and requirements of voting affect voter behavior and turnout. Your group PSAs will be shown to the class and your classmates will offer constructive feedback and comments. You may perform the PSA in class or record the PSA and play it in class.

**Required Text(s):** All required readings will be posted online. Reading schedule is attached.

**Required Viewing/Listening:** There will be required media to view and listen to outside of class. The weeks in which you will be expected to view and listen to these media will be listed in the course schedule as well:

- **Watch:** *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement* - Episode 6: "Bridge to Freedom" Available to stream through library services. (approximately 1 hour viewing)
- **Listen:** New Hampshire Public Radio *Civics 101* Podcast: "The Election" (approximately 23 minutes)  
<https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/theelection>

#### **Part IV: Course Policies**

**Course Conduct:** During class discussion, it is possible that we will discuss controversial topics that illicit emotional reactions. While such reactions are normal, all students must remain civil during course discussion. This course is to be a setting for academic, meritorious, and free flowing dialog concerning research on American elections. Derogatory comments made toward other students, the instructor, or other members of the school community will not be tolerated.

Additionally, technology such as laptops, iPads, and other devices necessary to take notes and aid in participation of the course are allowed. However, if these same devices become disruptive or distracting, the instructor reserves the right to alter the policy regarding use of technology in the classroom by students in order to eliminate distraction and disruption.

**Turning in of assignments:** all assignments are to be turned in by the assigned due date.

**Late work:** Students will be expected to strictly adhere to the assignment schedule articulated in the syllabus. Individual assignments are due at the date and time specified by the instructor. Turning in assignments on time allows the instructor to provide grades and feedback in a timely manner and minimizes the possibility of students falling behind. At my discretion, **late assignments will be deducted 5 points if submitted after the assigned time (but on same day), and 10 points will be deducted for every additional 24-hour period after the due date. I reserve the right to alter this policy on a case by case basis.**

**Assignment extensions:** Though turning in assignments after the due date will be costly, I am open to granting extensions on assignment due dates. In order to get a deadline extension, students must make a written request via email PRIOR to the deadline, and articulate a reason for the extension. Keep in mind, it *is* an option for me to **deny** the request. The request should include how much progress you have made on the assignment, what you propose to do during the extension, and how much additional time you request. In general, I am willing to grant extensions that allow to students to improve an already progressing assignment or paper, not for the purpose of allowing students to put off working on the assignment.

**Syllabus change policy:** Though we political scientists consistently promote the virtues of participatory democracy, we are poor practitioners of it. This syllabus shall be subject to change by the instructor at any time. Students will be given ample notice of syllabus changes. Any revised versions of the syllabus will be made available online.

## V. Course Outline and Weekly Learning Objectives

### Phase 1: Why Vote, Anyway?

#### Week 1 – Introduction to the Course

Students will:

- gain an understanding of course logistics
- be informed of course objectives

#### Week 2 – Why do we bother voting?

Students will:

- examine the costs of voting and learn competing explanations for why people vote
- become informed on how social scientists approach the question of why people vote

#### Week 3 – Where does our right to vote come from? Where does it NOT come from?

Students will:

- learn about the constitutional origins of the right to vote and its varied implementation
- develop and appreciation for the historical racial and economic disparities in institutional access to the ballot

#### Week 4: Who conducts elections?

Students will:

- gain and understanding of the state and local implementation of elections
- learn the consequences of varied implementation of elections
- understand how the implementation of elections has changed over time from local party machines to institutionalized elections administrators

### Phase 2: The Logistics of Voting & Reforms

#### Week 5: Early Voting

Students will:

- learn what Early Voting is and why different jurisdictions have different Early Voting rules
- learn what kinds of voters are more likely to Early Vote and whether increasing/decreasing Early Voting affects turnout

#### Week 6: Vote By Mail

Students will:

- how the logistics of vote-by-mail work in various states
- examine whether vote-by-mail affects turnout or yields partisan advantage

#### Week 7: Voter ID

Students will:

- examine the varied implementation of voter ID laws and *why* they are implemented
- analyze competing explanations as to why, or whether, voter ID laws affect turnout
- learn how racial disparities in voter experiences can occur because of voter ID laws

#### Week 8: Poll Workers

Students will:

- learn how poll workers are selected and what they do during the conduct elections
- analyze the critical importance of poll worker decision-making in voter experiences and outcomes

### Week 9: Voting in a Pandemic

Students will:

- learn how the COVID-19 pandemic affected elections reforms and changes
- examine whether or how these changes affected voter behavior and confidence

### **Phase 3: Election Administration & Its Effects on Elite & Voter Behavior**

### Week 10: Lines, Lines, Lines

Students will:

- learn the causes and consequences of long lines at the polling place
- examine the racial and economic disparities in the consequences of long lines on voter behavior

### Week 11: Voter Experience & Trust

Students will:

- learn the determinants of positive and negative voter experiences
- examine the determinants of voter confidence (or lack thereof) in election results

### Week 12: Political Rhetoric Around Election Administration

Students will:

- analyze whether political rhetoric around election administration can affect voter turnout and outcomes
- examine the accuracy (or, again, lack thereof) of political rhetoric regarding election administration and the various motivations of political rhetoric on election administration

### Week 13: All Right, Let's Talk About January 6<sup>th</sup>

Students will:

- learn the major events leading to the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, primarily focusing on how rhetoric regarding elections processes sowed distrust of election results
- examine the various reasons why many falsely believe the 2020 election was fraudulently determined

### Week 14, 15, &16: Presentations

Students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of voter motivations and logistics of voting via an original audio/visual project
- learn how to give and receive constructive peer feedback

VI. Part VII. Course Schedule

<b>Topics &amp; Readings</b>
<b>Phase 1: Why Vote, Anyway?</b>
<b>Week 0: No class</b> <b>Jan 12</b>
<b>Instructor absent due to SPSA Conference</b> <b>No class; review syllabus</b>
<b>Week 2: Why Do We Bother Voting?</b> <b>Jan 17 &amp; Jan 19</b>
Syllabus Overview to the course Downs, Anthony. 1957. <i>An Economic Theory of Democracy</i> (excerpts)
<b>Week 3: Where Does Our Right to Vote Come From (or not)?</b> <b>Jan 24 &amp; Jan 26</b>
“A Dream Undone: Inside the 50-year campaign to roll back the Voting Rights Act,” <i>The New York Times Magazine</i> , July 29, 2015. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html?_r=0">https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html?_r=0</a>
Bensel, Ricard. 2004. “The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1
<b>Watch:</b> <i>Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement</i> - Episode 6: “Bridge to Freedom” Available to stream through library services. (approximately 1 hour viewing)
<b>Week 4: Who Conducts Elections?</b> <b>Jan 31 &amp; Feb 2</b>
Bensel, Ricard. 2004. “The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2: “Structure and Practice of Elections”
Merivaki, Thessalia and Mara Suttman-Lea. “Designing Voter Education Across the States: State Responses to the Help America Vote Act.” <i>Election Law Journal</i> .
<b>Listen to:</b> New Hampshire Public Radio <i>Civics 101</i> Podcast: “The Election” <a href="https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/theelection">https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/theelection</a>
<b>Exam I</b> <b>Opened Feb 2 end of class and due by 11:59PM Feb 7</b>
<b>Phase 2: The Logistics of Voting &amp; Reforms</b>
<b>Week 5: Early Voting</b> <b>Feb 7 &amp; Feb 9</b>
Stein, Robert. 1998. “Early Voting.” <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i> 62(1): 57-69.
Herron, Michael C., & Daniel A. Smith. 2012. “Souls the Polls: Early Voting in Florida in the Shadow of House Bill 1355”. <i>Election Law Journal</i> 11(3): 331-347.

**Week 6: Vote by Mail  
Feb 14 & Feb 16**

Southwell, Priscilla & Justin Burchett. 2000. "The Effect of All-Mail Elections on Voter Turnout". American Politics Quarterly 28(1): pp. 72-79.

Elul, Gabrielle, Sean Freeder, and Jacob M. Grumbach. 2017. The Effect of Mandatory Mail Ballot Elections in California. Election Law Journal 16(3): 397-415.

**Week 7: Voter ID  
Feb 21 & Feb 23**

Barreto, Matt A., Stephen Nuno, Gabriel R. Sanchez, and Hannah L. Walker. 2018. "The Racial Implications of Voter Identification Laws in America. American Politics Research 47(2): 238 – 249.

Atkeson, Lonna Rae, Lisa A. Bryant, Thad E. Hall, Kyle L. Saunders and R. Michael Alvarez. 2010. "A New Barrier to Participation: Heterogeneous Application of Voter Identification Policies." Electoral Studies 29(1):66–73.

**Week 8: Poll Workers  
Feb 28 & Mar 2**

Suttman-Lea, Mara. 2020. "Poll Worker Decision Making at the American Ballot Box". American Politics Research: 1-5.

Atkeson, Lonna Rae, Yann P. Kerevel, R. Michael Alvarez and Thad E. Hall. 2014. "Who Asks for Voter Identification? Explaining Poll Worker Discretion." Journal of Politics 76(4):944–957.

**Week 9: Voting in a Pandemic  
Mar 7 & Mar 9**

Curiel, John A. and Jesse T. Clark. 2021. "Disparities in Poll Closures in the Age of COVID-19: A Case Study of Wisconsin. Election Law Journal.

Clinton, Joshua, John Lapinski, Sarah Lentz, and Stephen Pettigrew. 2021. "Trumped by Trump? Public Support for Mail Voting in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic." Election Law Journal.

**Exam II  
Opened Mar 9 end of class and due by 11:59PM Mar 12**

**Spring Break  
Mar 11 – Mar 19**

**Phase 3: Election Administration & Its Effects on Elite & Voter Behavior**

**Week 10: Lines, Lines, Lines  
Mar 21 & Mar 23**

Lamb, Matt. 2021. "Who Leaves the Line, Anyway? A Study of Who Leaves the Polling Place Lines and Why?." Election Law Journal 20(3): 301-314.

Pettigrew, Steven. 2020. "The Downstream Consequences of Long Waits: How Lines at the Precincts Depress Future Turnout." Electoral Studies 71: 1-17.

**Week 11: Voter Experience and Trust  
Mar 28 & Mar 30**

King, Bridgett. 2017. "Policy and Precinct: Citizen Evaluations and Electoral Confidence". *Social Science Quarterly* 98(2).

Atkeson, Lonna, and Kyle Saunders. 2007. "The Effect of Election Administration on Voter Confidence: A Local Matter?" *Political Science & Politics* 40 (4): 655–60

Chen, Cynthia, Arisa Sedegpour, & Matt Lamb. "Vote Centers and the Voter Experience." *American Politics Research* 49 (6), 591-603

**Week 12: Political Rhetoric Around Election Administration  
Apr 4 – Apr 6**

Cornwall, Warren. 26 Aug 2020. "Do Republicans or Democrats Benefits from Mail-In Voting? It turns out, neither: But this year's election could change everything." *Science*: <https://www.science.org/content/article/do-republicans-or-democrats-benefit-mail-voting-it-turns-out-neither>

Valentino, Nicholas A. and Fabian G. Neuner. 2017. "Why the Sky Didn't Fall: Mobilizing Anger in Reaction to Voter ID Laws." *Political Psychology* 38(2): 331-350.

**Week 13: All Right, Let's Talk About January 6<sup>th</sup>  
Apr 11 – Apr 13**

Inskeep, Steve. 8 Feb. 2021. "Timeline: What Trump Told Supporters for Months Before They Attacked. NPR.org. <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/08/965342252/timeline-what-trump-told-supporters-for-months-before-they-attacked>

**Week 14: Presentations  
Apr 18 – Apr 20**

Groups will present their GOTV PSAs

**Week 15: Presentations  
Apr 25 – Apr 27**

Groups will present their GOTV PSAs

**Week 16: Presentations  
May 2**

Remaining groups will present their GOTV PSAs  
Course wrap-up



## **Part VII. Texas Tech Policies and Resources**

### **Academic Integrity**

OP 34:12 Academic integrity is taking responsibility for one's own class and/or course work, being individually accountable, and demonstrating intellectual honesty and ethical behavior. Academic integrity is a personal choice to abide by the standards of intellectual honesty and responsibility. Because education is a shared effort to achieve learning through the exchange of ideas, students, faculty, and staff have the collective responsibility to build mutual trust and respect. Ethical behavior and independent thought are essential for the highest level of academic achievement, which then must be measured. Academic achievement includes scholarship, teaching, and learning, all of which are shared endeavors. Grades are a device used to quantify the successful accumulation of knowledge through learning. Adhering to the standards of academic integrity ensures grades are earned honestly. Academic integrity is the foundation upon which students, faculty, and staff build their educational and professional careers.

### **Academic Accommodations**

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note: instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact Student Disability Services in Weeks Hall 130 or call 806.742.2405.

### **COVID-19 Statement**

The University will continue to monitor CDC, State, and TTU System guidelines concerning COVID-19. Any changes affecting class policies or temporary changes to delivery modality will be in accordance with those guidelines and announced as soon as possible. Students will not be required to purchase specialized technology to support a temporary modality change, though students are expected to have access to a computer to access course content and coursespecific messaging. This is where students can find information about COVID testing, vaccinations, isolation, and quarantine. <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/communications/emergency/coronavirus/>. If you test positive for COVID-19, report your positive test through TTU's reporting system: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/communications/emergency/coronavirus/>. Once you report a positive test, the portal will automatically generate a letter that you can distribute to your professors and instructors

### **Holy Days**

The Texas Tech University also requires that instructors provide a statement about religious holy days. O P 34.19 states that: 1. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Texas Tax Code §11.20. 2. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. 3. A student who is excused under section 2 may not be penalized for the

absence; however, the instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to complete the assignment satisfactorily

### **Plagiarism**

Texas Tech University expects students to “understand the principles of academic integrity and abide by them in all class and/or course work at the University” (O P 34.12.5). Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that involves (1) the representation of words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer code, other expression, or media of another as one’s own and/or failing to properly cite direct, paraphrased, or summarized materials; or (2) selfplagiarism, which involves the submission of the same academic work more than once without the prior permission of the instructor and/or failure to correctly cite previous work written by the same student. This video, retrieved from the University of Kansas Libraries website, provides an example of a plagiarism definition as well as examples of plagiarism and how to avoid it. Please review Section B of the TTU Student Handbook for more information related to other forms of academic misconduct, and contact your instructor if you have questions about plagiarism or other academic concerns in your courses. To learn more about the importance of academic integrity and practical tips for avoiding plagiarism, explore the resources provided by the TTU Library and the School of Law.

### **LGBTQIA Support**

Office of LGBTQIA, Student Union Building Room 201, [www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu](http://www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu), 806.742.5433 Within the Center for Campus Life, the Office serves the Texas Tech community through facilitation and leadership of programming and advocacy efforts. This work is aimed at strengthening the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community and sustaining an inclusive campus that welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

### **Food Insecurity Statement**

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. The TTU Food Pantry is in Doak Hall 117. Please visit the website for hours of operation at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/foodpantry.php>.

### **Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Violence**

Texas Tech University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from gender and/or sex discrimination of any kind. Sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and other Title IX violations are not tolerated by the University. Report any incidents to the Office for Student Rights & Resolution, (806)-742-SAFE (7233) or file an online report. Faculty and staff members at TTU are committed to connecting you to resources on campus. Some of these available resources are: TTU Student Counseling Center, 806-742-3674, confidential support on campus. TTU 24-hour Crisis Helpline, 806-742-5555, (Assists students who are experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. If you call the helpline, you will speak with a mental health counselor.) Voice of Hope Lubbock Rape Crisis Center, 806-763- 7273, (24-hour hotline that provides support for survivors of sexual violence.) The Risk, Intervention, Safety and Education (RISE) Office, 806-742-2110, (provides a range of resources and support options focused on prevention education and student wellness.) Texas Tech

Police Department, 806-742- 3931, (To report criminal activity that occurs on or near Texas Tech campus.)

### **Civility in the Classroom**

Texas Tech University is a community of faculty, students, and staff that enjoys an expectation of cooperation, professionalism, and civility during the conduct of all forms of university business, including the conduct of student–student and student–faculty interactions in and out of the classroom. Further, the classroom is a setting in which an exchange of ideas and creative thinking should be encouraged and where intellectual growth and development are fostered. Students who disrupt this classroom mission by rude, sarcastic, threatening, abusive or obscene language and/or behavior will be subject to appropriate sanctions according to university policy. Likewise, faculty members are expected to maintain the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with all constituents of the university. [www.depts.ttu.edu/ethics/matadorchallenge/ethicalprinciples.php](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ethics/matadorchallenge/ethicalprinciples.php)