

**Political Science 159**  
**U.S. Political Participation**  
Fall Semester 2017  
Clark University

Jefferson 222

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00-10:15

Professor Robert Boatright

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Office Hours: Thursday 10:30-1:00

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*Course Description and Purpose:*

Americans, as we all have heard, are participating less and less in political activities today than they did in decades past. This is a puzzling phenomenon. Americans - and perhaps humans in general - are social beings. We like to join groups, we like to interact with others. What explains the decline of civic organizations and citizens' political groups? How are we to explain declining voter turnout, declining membership in political parties, or declining involvement in political movements? And how has this decline been felt across different demographic groups in society - for instance, how do men and women differ in their political activities, how does education matter, how do whites and nonwhites differ, how do younger adults differ from older adults, or how does one's place of residence matter? What are the causes of this decline, and what are the potential consequences of it? And, perhaps most importantly, is it always a good thing to encourage everyone to participate in politics?

In this class, we will consider different types of political activity in which American citizens engage, evidence regarding changes in Americans' political participation over time, and techniques that have been proposed to increase political participation. We will consider survey evidence on who participates in different types of activities, paying particular attention to the role that race, gender, education, income, and other demographic variables play in promoting or discouraging political action. We will consider (among other things) trends in citizens' support for and activity in political parties, citizens' decisions about whether to vote, interest group participation, protest movements, and participation in religious and public service organizations. We will devote particular attention to internet-based participation, the Tea Party movement, and the political activities of citizens who supported Donald Trump.

Many of the subjects we will explore in this course concern trends in the United States over the past few decades. It is my hope, however, that we will be able to use this class to look forward as well, to consider the ways in which Americans' political activities are likely to change over the coming decades and to evaluate particular methods of encouraging participation. Although we will confront a large body of work which demonstrates declining levels of participation in many types of political activities, we are unclear about the consequences of and remedies for this trend. The goals of this class are to help you understand the role citizen participation plays in American politics and to help you to think about how to overcome the barriers to participation that you and others face.

### *Format of the Course:*

As you can see, the course is divided into four sections. In the first, we consider broad trends in American political participation. We address how we would define political participation, how the frequency and modes of political participation in America have changed over the past four decades, and how America compares with other countries in terms of political participation. We will also consider differences within the American public - who participates, and who does not? Are these patterns consistent across different types of participatory activities? Why? We isolate out three competing factors in determining participation - social structure, social and political forces, and institutional arrangements, in order to analyze their effect on participation. Throughout this analysis, we will consider several different types of activities – including voting, interest group membership, and political party activism and membership - in order to study the interplay of these three factors. After we have these concepts under our collective belts, we will take some time to think about how to study participation on our own community – a brainstorming exercise that will be useful for your term projects. In the second part of the course, we will look at the two largest political movements active today – the so-called “netroots” of liberal activists and the Tea Party movement among conservatives. Hopefully, I will be able to convince members of some of these groups to join us during class. Third, we will consider the differences between participation in America’s largest cities and political engagement in smaller, working class towns and communities. And finally, we will assess the normative consequences of political activism – most of the participatory movements of the past decade have thrived on conflict, but is this good for the political system? Are there participatory tools that we can use to encourage greater civility among Americans?

### *Requirements*

*Class Participation:* The most important requirement for this class is your attendance and participation. In order to succeed in this class, you must show up for class, and you should come prepared to discuss the readings. I will take attendance at each class.

I hope to lecture less than half of the time; I will present the main arguments of the readings and seek to provide context for them, but *the goal of this class is for you to develop your own ideas about the proper role of citizen participation in our political system.* At times, I will ask you to send me e-mails before class outlining your own thoughts on the materials we have covered; other times, I will expect you to be participants in class discussions of the issues. I also expect you to ask questions of your fellow students when they make presentations. All of these factors, along with your attendance, will go into your participation grade.

Feel free to ask questions about aspects of the readings you do not understand. The level of the readings varies quite a bit; most require little background knowledge, but a few presume knowledge of statistics or of particular aspects of American political history. You do not need to have a thorough understanding of everything in the readings, and I do not expect you to understand the more complex statistical work we will encounter, but I will expect you to understand the main points in the readings and to ask about aspects you do not understand. Class attendance and participation will comprise 10 percent of your final grade.

*Exams:* There will be an in-class exam at the close of the fourth week of the course. As of that time, we will have finished our brief survey of the broader issues in political participation. Because much of that material is fairly straightforward, and because your work during the remainder of the class will depend on your ability to apply this material, an exam is the most appropriate means of ensuring that we are ready to go forward. There will also be a take-home final – an essay assignment handed out during the last week of class and due at the close of the exam period. Each of these exams will constitute twenty percent of your final grade.

*Term Paper and Oral Presentations:* Your main project for this course will be a group project, resulting in a term paper of approximately fifteen pages. Your groups will be assigned during the second week of the class. For this project, you will focus upon a particular political cause or issue; proposals will be due early in the semester (see the schedule below). You will assess the incentives and disincentives regarding citizen participation in regards to that issue, you will discuss historical patterns of participation by citizens affected by that issue, and you will discuss the future of activism on that issue. Your paper will be divided into two parts. First, you will write a six-to-eight page paper analyzing what our understanding of political participation says about your issue – what kind of issue is it? Who should become involved? How should people become involved? You will use the concepts we consider in the first six weeks of the course as a starting point for this paper, but you will also consult historical sources on this issue. You must use the Clark library in order to do this; it will not be possible to write this paper by relying exclusively on on-line sources. You will present your results in class during the sixth week of the semester, and you will receive a provisional grade for this paper. Second, you will use the material we consider in the second half of the course – on trends in citizen engagement and on methods of citizen mobilization on the political left and right over the past decade – to test whether your initial expectations were borne out and to speculate about the future of citizen engagement regarding this issue. One component of this will be field work in Worcester – you will discuss the issue with local activists. You will present this material during the thirteenth week of the course, and the final paper, of approximately fifteen pages, will be due during the exam period. You will be permitted to revise the first part as you go; the full term paper grade will be assessed based on your work on the final version of the paper. This paper will be worth forty percent of your grade, and the presentations related to it will be worth ten percent apiece. Most likely, you will receive a grade as a group, but I reserve the right to give individual grades if the group does not pursue the project in a cooperative manner.

- The first segment of the paper will be due in class on the due date; the final version may be submitted at my office or in the Political Science Department office any time up until the official due date.
- You may turn in a paper late for one grade fraction per day reduction (e.g. an A paper becomes an A- paper if it is one day late, then becomes a B+ paper on the second day, and so on).
- Papers cannot be emailed. Emailed papers will be returned to the student and will be subject to the grade-fraction-per-day reduction policy noted above.
- You must adhere to standard social science procedures regarding citations. All materials used must be appropriately cited, including materials that are found on websites.

*Summary: Class Requirements and Percent Contribution to Final Grade*

Requirement	Percent Contribution to Grade	Objective
Class participation	10%	Participation
In-class Exam	20%	Basic understanding of course material
Take-home Final	20%	Ability to think normatively about the course material
Oral Presentations (2)	10% total	
(Group) Term Paper (in 2 segments)	40% (advisory grade will be given for initial segment)	Ability to use course material to understand contemporary issues

Like most Clark courses, this class is worth four credit hours. That means that I expect you to commit approximately twelve hours of your time to the class each week, or 180 hours for the full semester. In addition to the three hours of class time per week, you should expect that the reading will take you four to five hours per week, the writing assignments or exam preparation will take two hours per week, and the collaborative projects will take an average of two hours per week. The amount of time you spend on each of these activities will, of course, vary from one week to the next.

*Class Support:*

Because this is a small course, and because it is a course about participation, it is my hope you find your own participation in this class useful, stimulating, and interesting. I am available for questions, concerns, and comments by email or voicemail. I will have regular office hours and am happy to meet with students at other times as well. Please do not hesitate to offer suggestions on how to make this class a good experience for you or on issues you would like to see covered.

### *Required Texts:*

The following texts are on sale at the bookstore. All other readings will be available on the class moodle site

Dalton, Russell. 2016. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Han, Hahrie, and Elizabeth McKenna. 2014. *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.1 Million Activists Transformed Field Campaigns in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. 2013. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gest, Justin. 2016. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hajnal, Zoltan. 2009. *America's Uneven Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brennan, Jason. 2016. *Against Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

### *Academic Honesty*

Finally, as you should be aware by now, the work you do in this course must be entirely your own. To be sure we all have the same understanding of academic integrity as it pertains to this course, here is what the Academic Advising *Blue Book* (p. 22) has to say on the subject:

Academic integrity is highly valued at Clark. Research, scholarship and teaching are possible only in an environment characterized by honesty and mutual trust. Academic integrity requires that your work be your own. Because of the damage that violations of academic integrity do to the intellectual climate of the University, they must be treated with the utmost seriousness and appropriate sanctions must be imposed. The maintenance of high standards of academic integrity is the concern of every member of the University community.

**Plagiarism** refers to the presentation of someone else's work as one's own, without proper citation of references and sources, whether or not the work has been previously published. Submitting work obtained from a professional term paper writer or company is plagiarism. Claims of ignorance about the rules of attribution, or of unintentional error are not a defense against a finding of plagiarism.

Suspected plagiarism cases will be referred to the Dean's office. If you are in doubt about whether you have provided adequate citation or used others' work properly, please talk with me before handing your paper in!

*Course Schedule:*

Tuesday, August 28: What do we mean when we talk about political participation?

Thursday, August 30: Trends in Political Participation, 2008-2016

CIRCLE Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge. 2017. “Millennials after 2016.” On line, <http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Millennials-after-2016-Post-Election-Poll-Analysis.pdf>

CIRCLE Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge. 2016. “Young Voters in the 2016 Election” On line, [http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CIRCLE-Full-Exit-Poll-Analysis\\_Final.pdf](http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CIRCLE-Full-Exit-Poll-Analysis_Final.pdf)

**I. Political Participation: Who, What, and Why**

Tuesday September 5 and Thursday September 7:

Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, Ch. 1-3

Tuesday September 12 and Thursday September 14:

Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, Ch. 4-5

Tuesday September 19 and Thursday September 21:

Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, Ch. 6-7

Monday September 25:

Political Science Department Harrington Lecture: Timothy Snyder, Yale University  
“On Tyranny”

Tuesday September 26:

Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, Ch. 8-9

Thursday September 28: ***Short Exam***

**II. Political Movements, Left and Right**

Tuesday October 3 and Thursday October 5: The Obama Campaign and the Netroots

Han and McKenna, *Groundbreakers*

Tuesday October 10: No Class

Thursday October 12: Visiting Lecturer, David Greenberg, “Republic of Spin”

(No morning class; Time and Location TBA)

Tuesday October 17 and Thursday October 19: The Tea Party  
Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*

Thursday October 19: William Shannon Lecture in American Politics:  
John F. Reynolds, University of Texas at El Paso, on political participation in the late 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century  
(4:30 PM, Location TBA. We will still have our morning class)

Tuesday October 24 and Thursday October 26  
***Student Presentations I; Term Paper Segment #1 Due***

### **III. Contemporary Issues in the Study of Political Participation**

Tuesday October 31 and Thursday November 2:  
Hajnal, *America's Uneven Democracy*

Tuesday November 7 and Tuesday November 14:  
Gest, *The New Minority*

(Thursday November 9: No Class)

Thursday November 16 and Tuesday November 21:  
***Student Presentations II; Term Papers Due***

Thursday November 23: No Class (Thanksgiving)

### **IV. Too Much Participation?**

Tuesday November 28 and Thursday November 30  
Brennan, *Against Democracy*

**Tuesday December 5**  
**Current Events Readings TBA**

Thursday December 7:  
Course Wrap-up  
***Final Exam Questions Distributed***

Friday December 15: Final Exams Due