

# Young People in American Politics- GOVT-223

July 11-August 11, 2022

Professor: Patrick McSweeney

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Room: ICC 107

Time: 10:50-12:45

Office hours: 2-3 pm MTWR, second floor of Lauinger Library or by appointment

## Course Goals:

This class covers many key concepts in political science research with a focus on young people in American politics. Youth often have different priorities, experiences, opportunities, and challenges than older people in the political system and this shapes their lives and the system. This course is divided into three sections. The first considers the process of political socialization as well as public opinion in general. The second looks at political participation, defined broadly, and representation. Finally, we focus on issues that affect young people and consider what role young people are or need to be taking to address them.

Along with introducing you to key concepts and debates in both US politics and political science research, the course is designed to help build the following skills

**Data analysis:** Many institutions are running surveys to understand the current cohort of young people. We will examine some of this data and use it to make data-driven arguments about young people in the political system. We will also learn to think critically about data, asking questions such as: What are some other questions they should be asking? Is this data representative? Is this the best question wording?

The following sources provide useful studies that either focus on or include young people. Throughout the semester I will be using reports from some of these sources, and they may also be useful data sources in your assignments

- [CIRCLE](#)
- [GenForward](#)
- [Harvard IOP Youth Poll](#)
- [Pew Research Center](#)

**Real life application:** You, most likely, are part of the current cohort of young voters. As we go through the class, we will be thinking about what lessons we can take and apply to our own lives. One thing I love about teaching at a university is that everyone is coming into a class with different life experiences, and I want us to take advantage of that opportunity to discuss ways your cohort of young people can leave an impact outside of the classroom.

**Understanding different viewpoints:** A key feature of the younger generations is the diversity and abundance of identities that shape the attitudes and participation of young people in politics. During this class we will consider the intersectionality of these identities especially as it relates to young people.

## Grading:

Short paper 1: 25%

Short paper 2: 25%

Final paper/presentation: 30%

Discussion board posts: 10%

Participation: 10%

## Grading scale:

|             |             |               |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 93-100 A    | 80-82.99 B- | 67-69.99 D+   |
| 90-92.99 A- | 77-79.99 C+ | 63-66.99 D    |
| 87-89.99 B+ | 73-76.99 C  | 60-62.99 D-   |
| 83-86.99 B  | 70-72.99 C- | Below 59.99 F |

## Required Books:

Della Volpe, John. *Fight: How Gen Z Is Channeling Their Fear and Passion to Save America*. St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022.

Holbein, John B., and D. Sunshine Hillygus. *Making young voters: Converting civic attitudes into civic action*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

## Short Papers:

During the class you will write two short papers (3-5 pages, double spaced) to demonstrate your understanding of the content and your ability to apply what you are reading and discussing. **You will only write two papers, so you can skip one prompt**

Short paper 1 (due 7/19): "Thinking of your own political socialization, what forces do you think played the biggest role in shaping your political attitudes? How are your experiences similar or different to your peers or what scholars have found?"

Short paper 2 (due 8/2): "Museum reflection- Describe how young people were reflected at the museum? What was strong? What could be improved? What did the museum teach you about young people in American politics, especially as it relates to participation?"

Short paper 3 (due 8/9): "Identify a political issue you consider important to young people. Describe how it impacts young voters and actions young people have taken to address it. What do you see as a solution to this issue?"

## Discussion Board Posts:

Each week you will be making one short post on the Canvas discussion board. Most of these small assignments involve finding small examples of something we are talking about in class. Write briefly (200-500 words) about what you have chosen. Please complete the assignment before 10 am on the date listed so we can discuss it further in class.

Week 1 [7/13]: Introduction- Choose a picture that helps explain your political identity or passions. This doesn't have to be a picture that includes you.

Week 2 [7/18]: History- explore online college yearbooks or college newspaper archives and find an interesting example of youth participation on an issue.

Week 3 [7/26]: Activism- explore the online presence of a youth activist group. What stands out to you?

Week 4 [8/3]: Issue- find a recent article about youth involvement in politics.

Week 5 [8/9]: Takeaway statistic- by the end of the class we will have discussed and looked at a number of statistics about young people. Share the statistic that you think is most important to the story of young people in American Government

## **Final Paper/Presentation:**

Young people are often criticized for their lack of participation in the political system. For your final project you will evaluate the merit of that criticism and create a proposal to either improve youth participation in politics or change the perception people have about young voters. I am giving you freedom about how you choose to create your final project. It could be a paper, presentation, video, podcast or any other creative medium you choose. Projects must include the following:

- Data to support your claim
- Inclusion of sources from the class
- Inclusion of additional sources not discussed in class
- A proposal to change youth participation or perceptions of youth participation that is evidence based

## **Participation:**

Active participation, both talking and listening, is key to the success of the discussions in the class. Participation is worth 10 percent of the overall grade. Keys to getting a good participation grade are regular attendance and thoughtful comments or questions that help advance our conversation and understanding of the materials. I will offer several opportunities for participation such as full class discussion, small group work, among other activities. Quality of participation is given more weight than quantity. Discussions of politics can get heated, so it is always important to ensure that you are being respectful of others.

## **Course Content:**

### **Section 1: Political socialization and public opinion**

- Where do political attitudes come from?
- What do young people think about politics and how are they different from older people?
- How has youth public opinion changed over time?
- What role does party identification and ideology play in youth attitudes?

- What is the impact of other demographic variables such as race and gender?

## **Section 2: Political participation and representation**

- How do young people participate in politics?
- What challenges do young people face in political participation
- What could improve youth participation in politics?
- What are the best methods for young people to achieve their policy goals?
- What is the importance of descriptive and substantive representation for young people?  
How can this be achieved?

## **Section 3: Young people and political issues**

*There are many issues that impact young people in either a unique or disproportionate way. Below is a rough list, but this can change based on the interests of the class.*

*Issues: Climate change, education, civil rights, civil liberties, immigration, war, jobs, gun control, healthcare, technology, sports etc.*

- What issues are important to young people?
- How can young people bring about change?
- What needs to be done to address the needs of young people in these issues?

## **Schedule and Readings:**

\*Readings not from the two assigned books will be on Canvas\*

*This schedule may change. The issues that impact young people are constantly evolving. I want the class to be able to adapt to these events, so we discuss the salient issues and readings. This is especially true for weeks 4 and 5 where we will be looking specifically at issues. I am also planning on bringing in guest speakers and the dates for these will depend on speaker availability.*

### **Week 1: Introductions, political socialization, public opinion**

- July 11: Introduction, Young People and Generations
  - Pickard Chapter 2
  - Phillip Cohen op-ed
- July 12: Family transmission, generational units
  - Jennings, Stoker and Bowers
  - Jennings 2002
- July 13: Media, events, school
  - Rabbit Hole podcast episode
  - Sears and Valentino (1997)
- July 14: Socialization review
  - Sapiro (2002)
  - Della Volpe chapter 1

### **Week 2: Participation (history, voting)**

- July 18: History
  - Port Huron Statement
  - Yearbook exercise
- July 19: Participation
  - Pickard chapter 3

- Holbein and Hillygus chapter 1
- Brady et al. 1995
- July 20: Voting
  - Wattenberg chapters
  - Holbein and Hillygus chapter 2-4
- July 21: Voting reforms
  - Holbein and Hillygus chapter 5-7

**Week 3: Participation (protest/nontraditional), Movements, Representation**

- July 25: Protest
  - Gillion chapter 1
  - Della Volpe chapter 2-4
- July 26: Movements and activism
  - Online activism exercise
  - Della Volpe 5-7
- July 27: Representation, running for office
  - Shames Chapter 1
  - Della Volpe 8-10
- July 28: National Museum of African American History and Culture:
  - Hogan “Who’s the Expert”

**Week 4: Issues part 1 (Climate, Civil Rights, Education)- readings on Canvas**

- August 1: Civil Rights and Race
  - Cohen Chapter 1
- August 2: Climate Change
- August 3: Education
- August 4: Immigration

**Week 5: Issues part 2 (Other issues), presentation of proposals- readings on Canvas**

- August 8: Media/Technology/Art/Sports
- August 9: International Issues
- August 10: other issue
- August 11: Presentations

## **Policy Statements**

### **Religious Holidays**

Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes 9

### **Special Accommodations**

If you believe that you have a disability, please contact the Academic Resource Center (<http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>) for further information. The center is located in the

Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

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If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email [sarp@georgetown.edu](mailto:sarp@georgetown.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985 or after hours, call (833) 960-3006 to reach Fonemed, a telehealth service; individuals may ask for the on-call CAPS clinician

More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the [Sexual Misconduct Website](#).

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