

Political Science 4000-2 – Voting Behavior in US National Elections
Spring Semester/2014; Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:50 in 229 Tureaud
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Office Hours: 9:00-10:20 T/Th and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to investigate the nature of elections and voting behavior in the United States. The course is roughly grouped into two main sections. In the first we will examine the major models of voting behavior and the factors that impact voter turnout and voter choice, the two most studied forms of political behavior. We will also take a closer look at information effects on political behavior. How much do people need to know to make a correct or consistent voting decision? The second half of the course will focus mainly on parties and elections in the electoral process. We will examine parties and party system change, as well as take a look at recent debates over whether and to what extent the public is polarized and how that affects elections and governance in America. We will also examine presidential nominations and general elections, as well as congressional elections. Finally, as time permits we will look at additional topics such as the media's role in voting behavior, and possibly genopolitics or the role of social influence in voting behavior.

I would like to follow the format of an extended research seminar. This means that we will meet to discuss the readings, not just to listen to me lecture, although that will be your punishment if you have nothing to say. You need not have more than a basic understanding of American government to do this. You also, of course, need to attend class and be willing to consider questions seriously within the context of the systematic study of voting behavior. Since this is a class about voting and elections, you should also keep informed of what's going on in the national political scene. I will periodically discuss campaign events and issues as they unfold during the course of the semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are two examinations, one paper, and class participation. The dates for exams and papers are listed on moodle in the class schedule and reading assignments section.

Exams: A midterm and a final will be given. The final is not comprehensive. The format of these exams will be discussed early in the semester. Some form of take-home exam is possible, particularly for the final. The midterm and final will each make up 25 percent of your grade.

Paper: The paper requirement will be discussed on the first day of class. A one page typed description of your paper is due on February 27. Failure to turn in this description will be reflected in your final paper grade. Final papers are due on April 10. A 5% per day penalty will be imposed on all late papers. They are to be 3000 words in length (approximately 8-10 pages). The paper will compose 30 percent of your grade.

Participation: Class participation will be composed of your actual participation in class, your performance on in-class assignments/quizzes, your submitted questions, and one additional assignment. These will be discussed on the first day of class. Participation will make up 20 percent of your grade.

TEXTBOOKS

Let's Vote, by Daniel Shea.

Controversies in Voting Behavior, by Niemi, Weisberg, and Kimball