

FALL 2009

PSC 313 VOTING AND PUBLIC OPINION

T and R: 8:00 - 9:20 97 Alumni

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Office hours: M and W: 8:00 - 10:00 and by appointment

The course is designed as an introduction to the study of elections and voting behavior in the United States. The course readings analyze how candidates campaign for public office, and how voters choose among them. The main focus is on presidential elections: the factors affecting voter turnout, people's attitudes toward the candidates, the issues, the parties, the performance of the incumbent President and other office-holders, the influence of the most salient events and public perceptions on the distribution of the vote. Senate and House elections will also be discussed, together with the most important differences between presidential and congressional contests regarding the conduct of campaigns and how voters cast their preferences. Finally, particular attention will be devoted to the 2008 elections and the interpretation of their outcome. The course is largely a lecture class, but students are strongly encouraged to participate in discussions of important concepts and current events, and raise questions about the material covered in the lectures or the readings.

Required Readings (available at the bookstores).

1) Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde. 2007. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections*. Washington: CQ Press. [AAR]

2) Lewis-Beck, Michael, Helmuth Norpoth, William Jacoby and Herbert Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. [AMVOTER]

Both volumes present and analyze data about public opinion and voting behavior collected by the American National Election Studies. These data, from 1952 through 2004, can be accessed at: <http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/nesguide.htm>

Data from the 2008 American National Election Studies, yet unavailable on-line, will be introduced and discussed in class.

Additional readings, available on-line, may be assigned on selected topics. In general, additional course material (and important announcements) will be posted on the course page at *UBLearns* (PSC313). For instance, there you can find (under *Course Documents*) the results of the 2008 presidential, Senate and House elections as well as data from the 2008 presidential election exit polls.

Course Requirements.

The course grade is based on a) class participation; b) midterm and final exams:

a) Class participation. Each student is expected to attend classes regularly. Informed participation will be noted and counted in a student's favor. [5%]

b) In-class exams. The midterm and final exams are designed to test a student's understanding of

the required readings and of the material presented in class. The midterm (on October 22) will account for 45% of the course grade; the final exam (to be scheduled during the December 14-21 period) will account for 50% of the course grade. Both exams will be composed of “objective” (true/false choice, followed by a brief explanation of either choice) and short identification (description and analysis of concepts and empirical evidence) questions.

Lateness and Extensions.

No make-ups or extensions will be granted, but documented emergencies will be considered on an individual basis. Thus, it is a student’s responsibility to inform *as early as possible* the instructor of any significant problem so that alternative arrangements can be made.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (September 1, 3)

Introduction: Voters, Campaigns and Candidates

- The Institutional Context
- Candidates and Their Campaigns
- Voters: Turnout and Preferences
- Course Organization and Overview

Readings: AAR: pp. 1-14; AMVOTER: ch 1-2.

Week 2 (September 8, 10)

The Rules and Results of the Electoral Game: Congressional and Presidential Elections

- The Electoral College and the Popular Vote
- Single-Member Districts: Apportionment and Redistricting
- Nominations
- Campaign Finance: Congressional and Presidential Elections

Readings: AAR: ch. 1-3.

“Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote” (UBLearns)

The Electoral College: 2012 Estimates - Map (UBLearns)

2008 Presidential Election: Winner in States, Congressional Districts - Table (UBLearns)

The Presidential Election Campaign Fund and Tax Checkoff: Background and Current Issues (UBLearns)

The Cost of Winning an Election, 1986 - 2006 Table (UBLearns)

Primary Money Raised and Spent: January 2007 - June 2008 Table (UBLearns)

Presidential Campaign Receipts: 1996 - 2008 Table (UBLearns)

Week 3 (September 15, 17)

Presidential and Congressional Elections: Turnout

- Historical Record
- Forces Affecting Electoral Participation: Legal, Social, Political
- Political Relevance of Different Turnout Rates

Readings: AAR: ch. 4; AMVOTER: ch. 5, pp. 348-359.
Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004 (UBLeArns)
Turnout in 2008: Bureau of the Census (UBLeArns)

Week 4-5 (September 22, 24, 29)

Presidential Elections: Partisan Coalitions

- Social Groups and Partisan Alignments
- Formation and Decline of the New Deal Coalition
- New Politically Relevant Groups
- Candidate Support Among Social Groups

Readings: AAR: ch. 5; AMVOTER: ch. 11; pp. 334-348, 361-363.

Week 5-6 (October 1; October 6, 8)

Presidential Elections: Candidate Evaluations

- Image and Reputation of the Candidates
- Overall Evaluations: Candidate “Thermometers”
- Candidate Traits and Affect Towards Candidates

Readings: AAR: pp. 133-137; AMVOTER: pp. 42-58.

Week 7-8 (October 13, 15; October 20)

Presidential Elections: Policy Preferences

- Influence of Issues on Voting: Theory
- Perception of Important Issues
- “Issue Ownership”: Issue Agenda and Partisan Advantage
- Influence of Issues on Voting: Evidence from Recent Elections

Readings: AAR: pp. 137-159; AMVOTER: pp. 31-41, 58-9; ch. 8; pp. 201-238, 415-420.

***** October 22: In-class Midterm Exam *****

Week 9-10 (October 27, 29; November 3, 5)

Presidential Elections: Performance Evaluations

- Retrospective and Prospective Voting
- Electoral Mandates and Elite Responsiveness
- Bread and Guns: Peace, Prosperity and the Vote

Readings: AAR: ch. 7; AMVOTER: ch. 13.

Week 11 and 12 (November 10, 12; November 17, 19)

Presidential Elections: Party Loyalties

- Party Identification: Concept and Measurement

- Party Identification in the Electorate: Continuity and Change
- Party Identification and the Vote: Loyalty and Defection
- Party Identification, Policy Preferences, Performance Evaluations, and the Vote: Recent Elections and the 2008 Outcome

Readings: **AAR:** ch. 8, 12; **AMVOTER:** ch. 6-7, 14.

Week 13-14 (November 24; December 1, 3)

Congressional Elections: Candidates, Campaigns and Voters

- Incumbency, Candidate Experience, and Competition
- Campaign Finances
- House and Senate Differences
- The Influence of Incumbency
- Party Identification and Issues
- Presidential “Coattails,” Split-Ticket Voting, Divided (vs. Unified) Government

Readings: **AAR:** pp. 207-211; ch. 9-10.

Week 15 (December 8, 10)

The 2006 Midterm and the 2008 Congressional Elections: Democratic Gains

- The Influence of Local and National Forces
- Referendum on the Incumbent Administration: The “Midterm Penalty”
- An Assessment of the 2008 Results
- Looking Forward: Expectations about the 2010 Midterm

Readings: **AAR:** ch. 11.

Gary Jacobson. Referendum II: The Bush Legacy in the 2008 Congressional Elections
(UBLeads)

***** In-class Final Exam: TBD *****