

Political Science 305: Elections and Voting Behavior

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall Semester 2020

Lectures online Mondays & Wednesdays 3:30-4:20pm

Professor: Barry Burden

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drop-in online office hours Tuesdays 11am-Noon

also available by appointment at other times

TA: Jessie Martin

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Sections 302, 306, & 307

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drop-in office hours Tuesdays 2-4pm

Description

This course takes place amid the heat of the 2020 presidential campaign. We will do our best to make sense of what is happening in this election cycle by taking a wider view of U.S. elections that puts current events in context.

Elections are essential elements of a successful democracy. Americans in particular are asked to vote frequently and on a large number of offices and issues. How well do people exercise these opportunities? And how well do election results reflect the interests of the electorate?

This course will examine the many factors that affect voter participation and how voters make decisions. Together we will explore theories dealing with party identification, group and geographic patterns, economic accountability, issue voting, and more. A nagging question will be present throughout all of these topics: do American elections facilitate making “good” decisions?

Specific learning outcomes for this course are to: (1) develop a theoretical and empirical understanding of how individuals make voting decisions, (2) be able to analyze factors that affect the results of particular elections, (3) interpret surveys and election data to analyze how specific variables affect voters, and (4) develop a basis for evaluating the health of the U.S. electoral system.

The course material will include major theories of electoral behavior, but the approach will be mainly empirical. The readings are full of data. Be prepared to spend some time with graphs and tables, and to conduct some hands-on analysis. I hope you enjoy the material, ask probing questions, are surprised by some of the findings, and finish the

semester with some new tools for understanding the electorate. Because the pandemic has stopped so many other activities, this semester is a terrific opportunity to devote yourself into learning.

Requirements

Students are expected to do all of the assigned reading, attend online lectures ready to learn, participate constructively in section discussions, and to put in their best efforts in the assignments and exams.

Lectures will be offered synchronously with opportunities for student questions and participation. They will also be recorded in case a student must miss class due to illness or other unavoidable disruptions, or wants to re-watch a portion of a lecture, but the expectation is that we are online together. It will make for a more engaging experience for all of us. I will remain online for a while after each lecture to address any comments or questions you were not able to offer during the session.

Section meetings will be in-person on campus until the Thanksgiving break for some students but will be synchronous online meetings for other students. Consistent participation in these meetings will enhance both your learning and sense of community this semester.

There is one core textbook that comprises most of the required reading: *Change and Continuity in the 2016 and 2018 Elections* by Aldrich, Carson, Gomez, and Rohde. The textbook may be purchased in paper form (from the UW Bookstore or other retailers) or as a digital e-book. The important thing is to purchase the correct edition.

The texts will be supplemented with readings from other sources available on the course web site on Canvas. Students are expected to check e-mail and the web site regularly for news and course materials. I reserve the right to adjust the syllabus and readings as the semester progresses, especially if the spread of the coronavirus disrupts the university's plans for teaching.

Do your best to keep up with the daily news about the 2020 election by following high quality journalism. We will have limited time in lecture to discuss current events and the material should provide frameworks to analyze what is happening in real time.

Office hours are for you. Students are encouraged to make use of drop-in office hours, as I am guaranteed to be online ready to chat or answer questions. Appointments for meetings outside of regular office hours are also possible. They are perhaps the best way for me to get to know you and understand how you are experiencing the course. Please contact me or your TA at any point if you would like to talk about the material, course logistics, or other issues.

This is three-credit course meets the traditional Carnegie definition for how credit hours are met.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following items:

Midterm exam (Oct 26)	20%
Final exam (Dec 16)	30%
Forecasting project (due Oct 16)	20%
Section participation	15%
Extracurricular activity (dates vary)	15%

The two exams will be synchronously and will likely involve a combination of short answers and brief essays. The forecasting project will be a take-home exercise in which you use a statistical model to predict the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Section attendance and participation are important ways to demonstrated your engagement and will be tracked by your TA. The extracurricular activity will be participating and reflecting on an experience outside of class that is likely to include the following opportunities: serving as a poll worker, participating in debate watch, or attending an Elections Research Center event. More details about the extracurricular options will be provided later in the semester as they develop.

The grading scale is as follows:

A = 93-100%
AB = 88-93%
B = 83-88%
BC = 78-83%
C = 70-78%
D = 60-70%
F = 0-60%

Other Considerations

Your success in this class is important to me. This is going to be a different kind of semester than any of us anticipated, and you may experience more unexpected disruptions to your studies than is normal. Please let me know if issues arise that affect your ability to engage with the course. Contacting me earlier rather than later makes it more likely that I can be of assistance.

All of us benefit when the classroom environment draws on our diversity and values the contributions of each person. We all have things to learn from one another and each participant in the class has insights to contribute that enrich the university community.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact the teaching team early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

Academic misconduct is not tolerated. All academic work must be your own and cite others' work appropriately. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

We must prioritize our collective health to keep the university community safe. Students participating in physical section discussions on campus need to abide by university precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. You are expected to maintain physical distancing of six feet from others and wear a face covering correctly when inside campus buildings unless provided an official accommodation. If you need to isolate or quarantine because of illness or exposure to the virus, please contact me and your TA about how to continue your progress in the course.

Makeup exams are expected to be rare. They require extenuating circumstances and must be approved in advance if there is not a dire emergency. An assignment will be penalized 10 percentage points for each day it is late without instructor permission.

Tentative Schedule

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| Sep 2, Sep 9, & Sep 14
(No class on Sep 7) | Introduction
Role of a Voter in a Democracy
<i>Change and Continuity</i> [introduction]
Lupia, "How Elitism Undermines the Study of
Voter Competence"
Schaffner & Luks, "Misinformation or Expressive
Responding?" |
| Sep 16, Sep 21, & Sep 23 | Voter Turnout
<i>Change and Continuity</i> [chapter 4]
Wattenberg, "Where Have All the Young Voters
Gone?" |
| Sep 28, Sep 30, & Oct 5 | Explaining the Vote
<i>Change and Continuity</i> [chapters 2 & 3]
Sides, Tessler, and Vavreck, "The Electoral
Landscape of 2016" |
| Oct 7, Oct 12, & Oct 14 | Congressional Elections
<i>Change and Continuity</i> [chapters 9 & 11]
Campbell, "Explaining Electoral Change in the 2018
US Midterm Elections: The Three
Components of Electoral Mandates" |

- Oct 19 & Oct 21 **Presidential Nominations**
Change and Continuity [chapter 1]
 Cohen et al., “Party Versus Faction in the Reformed
 Presidential Nominating System”
- Oct 26 **Midterm Exam**
- Oct 28 & Nov 2 **Election Administration**
 Stewart, “A Voter’s Eye View of Elections, 2008-
 2016”
- Nov 4 **Election Recap**
- Nov 9, Nov 11, & Nov 16 **Demographic Groups and the Vote**
Change and Continuity [chapter 5]
 Carnes & Lupu, “The White Working Class and the
 2016 Election”
- Nov 18, Nov 23, & Nov 30 **Partisanship and Polarization**
 (No class on Nov 25) *Change and Continuity* [chapter 8]
 Shaw, “If Everyone Votes Their Party, Why Do
 Presidential Election Outcomes Vary So
 Much?”
 Abramowitz and Webster, “Negative Partisanship:
 Why Americans Dislike Parties but Behave
 Like Rabid Partisans”
- Dec 2, Dec 7, & Dec 9 **Candidates, Issues, and Performance**
Change and Continuity [chapters 6 & 7]
 Petrocik, “Issue Ownership in Presidential
 Elections, with a 1980 Case Study”
 Mayer, “The Disappearing – but Still Important –
 Swing Voter”
- December 16 **Final exam (10:25am-12:05pm)**