

Political Science 377: Elections, American Style
Fall 2021
Version 1.0 (August 25, 2021)

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Course Summary:

This class covers only a slice of what is one of the most dynamic areas of study in political science—democratic decision-making via the election process. Since the first emergence of political science as a discipline in the United States in the late 1800s, scholars, politicians, and the public at large have experimented, argued, and reformed our processes and procedures for running elections, in an attempt to balance a desire for democratic control with need to have a coherent and stable government; responsive and representative elites; and political outcomes that reflect some – but not unlimited – levels of public input.

Inevitably, this means choices have had to be made in terms of coverage.]There are many areas of elections that we do not cover—campaigns and political communications, candidate emergence, political socialization and learning are but a few. What we do cover here are the main elements of election administration in the United States, the officials who administer elections, and how their administrative choices impact the voting behavior of citizens. We also touch upon the motivations for turnout among college students and racial and ethnic minorities.

We will also work as a group to build a set of election science exercises, some of which you will be asked to write up for assignments in the course. Each of these exercises will ideally be suited for use in a future 400-level version of this course.

You will have a final research project that should take shape by the Fall break. These projects are case studies of a local election official or of a voter education effort of one of one or more local election officials:

1. Profile an LEO and a Jurisdiction:
 - a. A “deep dive” into the laws, administrative procedures, and voting patterns in one local election jurisdiction
 - b. Conduct an in-depth interview with the local election official in that jurisdiction
 - c. Discuss the jurisdiction, LEO, and the 2020 response in light of the literature we have read
2. Profile a voter education effort of one more more LEOs
 - a. A “deep dive” into the laws, administrative procedures, and voting patterns in one or more local election jurisdictions
 - b. Conduct a content analysis of voter education efforts on their webpages and social media
 - c. Discuss the voter education efforts in light of the literature we have read

3. In both cases, your final project consists of a poster and poster session to be scheduled at the end of the semester, and a final paper.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to identify the legal, administrative, and behavioral features of the American electoral landscape, such as local, state, and federal authority in election administration; racial and age differences in turnout; and how different methods of voting are administered and utilized.
- Students will derive hypotheses from scientific literature on elections and voting; use data and election science tools to analyze administrative records and survey data on voter opinions and voting behavior; and prepare slide decks, research posters, and oral presentations that communicate and explain political science relationships.
- Students will connect current legal and political disputes over voting rights, voter suppression, and gerrymandering to the historical and social scientific literatures and understand when and how political science and data science can impact these disputes.

Readings:

There are no books requested for the course, but we do read the entirety of one book which is easily available from a variety of sources, and a substantial portion of two other books. Other readings will be made available on the Moodle and journal articles can be accessed via the Reed library.

Hasen, Rick. 2020. *Election Meltdown*. We read all of this book.

Mason, Lillian. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago. We read approximately half of this book.

Class requirements:

- Assignments (graded)
 - One class presentation and PowerPoint deck
 - Three page research proposal
 - Final project poster and term paper
- Data Encounter Exercises (check-offs)
 - Four election science assignments (to be worked on in class; PDF and R code need to be turned in).
 - These can be completed individually or in groups of 2
- Class Attendance and Participation

Class attendance: This is an in-person class. Therefore, when your health allows, you are expected to be present and engaged in class. At the same time, each community member has an individual responsibility to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Following public health guidance is part of living in an honorable community.

The following recommendations should guide your decision about coming to class:

- Self-isolation is the recommended course of action for anyone experiencing flu-like symptoms, whether due to possible coronavirus or to other illnesses. Please stay at home if you feel sick, and contact the Health and Counseling Center (HCC) or your healthcare provider to discuss. This is especially important if you think you may have an infectious disease.
- You should not attend class if you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 10 days, or if you have received notification or advice from the college or a health professional (including HCC staff) to quarantine or self-isolate.
- The CDC suggests that people with the following symptoms may have COVID: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea. As always, please consult a medical professional (members of the HCC or otherwise) if you have any questions about your health or health safety.
- If you suspect or know you have been exposed to a case of COVID-19, contact the HCC right away to discuss your next steps. [For more information, visit the CDC's webpage on isolation and quarantine.](#)

If you need to miss a class, or series of classes, due to illness, self-isolation, and/or quarantine, you are responsible for emailing me to let me know as soon as possible. You are also responsible for coordinating with me to complete work that you might miss due to absences.

Students who have been approved for attendance-related accommodations (or other accommodations) through Disability & Accessibility Resources (DAR) should contact me individually to determine a plan for implementation. Students who do not have formal accommodations in place but are interested in seeking disability accommodations should contact (DAR) at dar@reed.edu.

Course Schedule

1. August 31: Introduction

- Introduction to the complexities of election laws, administration, and voting behavior in the United States
- Application: The California Recall election.
- Hubler, Shawn and Jill Cowan. August 25, 2021. "Can Gov. Newsom keep his job? A recall effort in California shows a dead heat." *New York Times*. [Link](#).

2. September 2: Election 2020, from Celebration to Insurrection

- Persily, Nathan and Charles Stewart III. 2021. "The Miracle and the Tragedy of the 2020 U.S. Election." *Journal of Democracy* 32(2): 159-178. [Link](#).
- Ghitza, Yair and Jonathan Robinson. Undated. "What Happened in 2020." Report from Catalist. <https://catalist.us/wh-national/>

- c. Igielnik, Ruth, Scott Keeter, and Hannah Hartig. June 30, 2020. “Behind Biden’s 2020 Victory: An examination of the 2020 electorate, based on validated voters.” Report of Pew Research Center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/> ([PDF Link](#))
- d. Additional resources:
 - i. Jackson et al., November 2020, “US Election Analysis 2020: Media, Voters, and the Campaign.” A joint report issued by the Center for Comparative Politics and Media Research, The Political Studies Association, and the American Political Science Association. [Link](#).

3. September 7: The Basics (1), Election Administration in the United States

- a. Hale, Kathleen and Mitchell Brown. 2020. *How We Vote: Innovation in American Elections*. Introduction, Chs. 1-2 (pg. 1-73)
- b. Hale, Kathleen, Robert Montjoy, and Mitchell Brown. *Administering Elections: How American Elections Work*. Chs. 1, 2, 4 (pgs.1-53, 77-96).
- c. Additional resources:
 - i. National Conference of State Legislatures State Elections Resources page provides comprehensive information on laws and procedures used in the 50 states.
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/election-laws-and-procedures-overview.aspx>

4. September 9: Managing Change and Innovation in Elections

- a. Merivaki, Lia and Daniel A. Smith. “Challenges in Voter Registration.” (pg. 59-82)
- b. Stein, Robert, Christopher Mann, and Charles Stewart III. “Polling Place Quality and Access” (pg. 83-102)
- c. King, Bridgett. “Diversity and Descriptive Representation in Election Administration.” (pg. 169-184)
- d. Lichtenfeld, Peter. “The Role of Election Vendors in Election Administration.” (pg. 201-212)
- e. All from Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, and Bridgett King. 2020. *The Future of Election Administration*.
- f. **Data Encounter (1): Produce A Demographic Table for a State**
 - i. Access and execute an R Script which produces a pretty table of Census data for a state
 - ii. Submit your R Script and PDF Table to the Moodle by September 16.
 - iii. **Participate in a state and local election laws and rules treasure hunt!**
 - iv. ~~Sign up for one state to report on for next week. See your options at the Healthy Elections Project “State Profiles”~~

(<https://healthyelections.org>)

~~g. **FIRST ASSIGNMENT: INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION**~~

- ~~i. Prepare an 8 minute PowerPoint presentation for next Thursday to discuss the elections ecosystem, demographics, and 2020 election responses in one state.~~

5. September 14: The 2020 Election and Election Data Science

- a. Class Discussion with [Jonathan Robinson](#), Director of Research at Catalist, on the art and (data) science of elections
- b. ~~**FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY**: See September 9.~~
- c. ~~Please submit Powerpoint slide decks to the Moodle by September 15 at 5 5 pm and be prepared to give an 8 minute presentation.~~

6. September 16: The Basics (2), Who Runs Elections?

- a. Adona, Natalie, Paul Gronke, Paul Manson, and Sarah Cole. June 26, 2019. "Stewards of Democracy: The Views of American Local Election Officials." Report from the Democracy Fund. [Link](#).
- b. Manson, Paul, Natalie Adona, Jay Lee, and Paul Gronke. April 14, 2021. "Staffing the Stewards: Gender, Race, and Representative Bureaucracy." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.
- c. Kimball, David C. and Martha Kropf. 2006. "The Street-Level Bureaucrats of Elections: Selection Methods for Local Election Officials." *Review of Policy Research* 23(6): 1257-1268.

7. September 21: How Political Science Studies Local Election Officials

- a. White, Ariel R., Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller. 2015. "[What Do I need to Vote? Bureaucratic Discretion and Discrimination by Local Election Officials.](#)" *American Political Science Review* 109(1): 129-142.
- b. McBryer, Markie. R. Lucas Williams, and Andrea Eckelman. 2020. "[Local Elections Officials as Partisan Operatives: The Effect of County Officials on Early Voting Administration.](#)" *Social Science Quarterly* 101(4): 1475-1488.
- c. Pettigrew, Stephen. 2017. "The Racial Gap in Wait Times: Why Minority Precincts are Underserved by Local Election Officials." *Political Science Quarterly* 132(3): 527-547. [Link](#).
- d. Brown, Mitchell and Kathleen Hale. 2020. "The Evolution of Professionalism in the Field of Election Administration." In Brown, Hale, and King, *The Future of Election Administration*.

8. September 23: Doxxing, Death Threats, and Other Minor Inconveniences

- a. Gordon, Grace. June 2021. "Documenting and Addressing Harassment of Election Officials." Report of the California Voter Foundation. [Link](#).
- b. Bilchik, Gloria Shur. 2020. "The Accidental Profession." Ch. 3 in *Election Insiders*.

- c. Class visit by [Grace Gordon](#), program consultant for EVIC at Reed College and [Natalie Adona](#), Assistant Clerk-Recorder of Nevada County, CA discussing their experiences in 2020 and a potential final research project.

9. September 28: How Local Election Officials Educate and Motivate Voters and NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION DAY!

- a. Merivaki, Lia and Mara Suttman-Lea. 2021. "Voter Education and Outreach Policies Across the States: A Case for Systematic Data Collection." *Election Law Journal* (forthcoming.)
- b. Class visit [Merivaki](#), Professor at Mississippi State University and [Suttman-Lea](#), Professor at Connecticut College discussing their current research and a potential final research project.

10. September 30: Voter Fraud, Voter ID, and the Myths That Impact American Elections

- a. Hasen, Richard L. 2020 *Election Meltdown*. Entire book.
- b. No Class: Paul is in Seattle for the American Political Science Association Meeting

11. October 5: The Attack on Voting and How Other Communities Responded

- a. Rutenberg, Jim. September 30, 2020. "The Attack on Voting." *New York Times Magazine*. [Link](#).
- b. Dominus, Susan. Aug. 24, 2021. "He was the 'perfect villain' for Voting Conspiracists." *New York Times Magazine*. [Link](#).
- c. Class visit by [Jennifer Morrell](#), Cofounder of The Elections Group and Michelle Shafer, primary at [The Magenta Group](#).

12. October 7: Data Encounter (2), the Election Administration and Voting Survey

- a. Election Assistance Commission, August 2021, *Election Administration and Voting Survey 2020 Comprehensive Report*, read "Executive Summary", Chapter 1 (1-53) and Chapter 2 (54-84).
- b. We will access and produce very basic tables and figures from the 2020 EAVS.
- c. Provide me code and a PDF output that reproduces either Table 2, Figure 4 (just using 2020), or any other tables or figures before Fall Break.

13. October 12: Qualitative Research Methods and Final Project Discussion

- a. Leech, Beth. 2002. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36(4): 665-668.
- b. Mack, Natasha et al. 2005. *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. US Aid Publication. Chs 1 and 3. (pg. 1-12, 29-49).

- c. Mosely, Layna. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Introduction, Chs. 4 and 11.
- d. Provide me a statement of your proposed final research project **BY OCTOBER 26.**

14. October 14: Data Encounter (3), the Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement

- a. Using the package *cpsvote* written by Jay Lee '19, see if you can reproduce two or more figures from Persily and Stewart or from Fraga.
- b. Handout: "Using *cpsvote* to analyze voting behavior".
- c. Provide me code and PDF output by October 28.

15. October 21-23 FALL BREAK

16. October 26: The Right to Vote in History and in Current Jurisprudence

- a. Alexander Keyssar, 2000, *The Right to Vote*. Chs. 1-3 (1-60) and 9 (258-294).
- b. Brown-Dean, Khalilah, Zoltan Hajnal, Christina Rivers, and Ismail White. April 5, 2015. "50 Year Of The Voting Rights Act: The State of Race in Politics." Report from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. [Link](#).
- c. Elmendorf, Christopher S. and Douglas M. Spencer. 2015. "[Administering Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act after Shelby County](#)." *Columbia Law Review* 115(8): 2143-2218.

d. FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE TODAY

17. October 28: Voting Rights Litigation In Practice: *Shelby County* and *Brnovich*

- a. Supreme Court of the United States. July 1, 2021. *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*. [Link](#).
- b. Charles, Guy-Uriel E. and Luis E. Fuentes-Rohwer. July 2, 2021. "The Court's Voting-Rights Decision Was Worse Than People Think." *The Atlantic Monthly*. [Link](#).
- c. Possible Class Visit

18. November 2: Voters (1), What Motivates Voter Turnout (with a focus on young voters)?

- a. Holbein, John B. and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2020. *Making Young Voters*. Chs. 1-3, 6.
- b. Elizabeth Bennion and David Nickerson. 2018. "What We Know About Mobilizing College Students."
- c. McDonald, Jared and Michael Hanmer. 2018. "Understanding and Confronting Barriers to Youth Voting in America."

19. November 4: Voter Turnout At Reed College

- a. Reed College NSLVE Reports for 2014, 2016, and 2018
- b. **FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE NOVEMBER 11:** Write up to three page “thesis proposal” that focuses on voter turnout at Reed
- c. You may wish to reference:
 - i. [Reedies Vote!](#)
 - ii. [Reed College’s Voting FAQ](#)
 - iii. Reed College 2016 Voter Engagement Plan

20. November 9: Voters (2), Racial and Ethnic Inequalities in Turnout

- a. Fraga, Bernard. 2018. *The Turnout Gap*. Chs 1-3 (pg. 1-71), and Chs. 6-7 (pgs. 126-194).

21. November 11: Voters (3), How did Americans become so politically polarized?

- a. Aldrich, Gomez, Carson, and and Rohde. *Change and Continuity in the 2016 Elections* Ch. 8.
- b. Lillian Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chs. 1-5, 8.
- c. **FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY**

22. November 16: How Political Science Engages the Fraud Debate

- a. Daniel Biggers and Michael Hanmer. 2017. “Understanding the Adoption of Voter Identification Laws in the American States.” *American Politics Research*. Available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1532673X16687266>
- b. Perez, Vanessa. 2021. “America’s first voter identification laws: The effects of personal registration and declining party competition on presidential election turnout, 1880-1916.” *Electoral Studies* 69. [Link](#).
- c. Ender, Adam M. et al. 2021. ”The 2020 Presidential Election and Beliefs about Fraud: Continuity or Change?” *Electoral Studies* 73. [Link](#).

23. November 18: Data Encounter (4): The American National Election Study

- a. The American National Election Study Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior <https://electionstudies.org/resources/anes-guide/>
- b. Using the ANES at sda.berkeley.edu:
 - i. Display in a graph the proportion of strong, weak, and “leaners” who voted for the other party’s presidential candidate since 1972.
 - ii. Display self-reported turnout by Whites, African-Americans, and Latinos
 - iii. Report on your results in a Word or Google Document, with all graphics and tables “nicely” labeled by November 30.

24. November 22-24 Individual Meetings to Discuss Final Projects

- a. Students will sign up for final project meetings

25. November 30: Presenting Research Results as a Poster

- a. Examples of effective posters
- b. Testing of styles and templates for poster presentations

26. December 2, 3: Individual Meetings to Discuss Final Projects

27. December 7: End of Semester Celebration

- a. Food and refreshments, discussion Hasen book and see if we can produce some positive outlooks on American elections