Political Science 305: Elections and Voting Behavior

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall Semester 2018
Monday/Wednesday 2:25-3:15pm
22 Ingraham Hall

Professor:
Barry Burden
101B North Hall
bcburden@wisc.edu
office hours: Wednesday 9-11am & by appointment

Teaching Assistants:
Michael DeCrescenzo
101A North Hall
Tuesday 2:30-4:30pm
decrescenzo@wisc.edu

Rochelle Snyder
121 North Hall
Monday 10-11am &
Thursday 11am-Noon
rsnyder4@wisc.edu

Description

This course takes place amid the heat of the 2018 midterm elections. We will try to make sense of what is happening this year by taking a wider view of U.S. elections that puts current events in a broader context.

Elections are essential elements of a successful democracy. Americans in particular are asked to vote frequently and on a wide range of offices and issues. How well do people exercise these opportunities?

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: are Americans capable of making “good” decisions? At the end of course you should have a firm understanding of theories of voting behavior and a means for answering this question.

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.
Requirements

Students are expected to do all of the assigned reading, attend lectures ready to learn, actively participate in section meetings, and to put in their best efforts in the assignments and exams. Please come to class on time and do not allow electronic devices to interfere with the learning experience.

Two core textbooks comprise most of the required readings:


There are multiple editions of the textbooks, so be sure to get the correct ones. The texts will be supplemented with readings from other sources available on the course web site (Learn@UW). Students are expected to check e-mail and the web site frequently for news and course materials. I reserve the right to adjust the syllabus and readings as the semester progresses.

Office hours are for you. Students are encouraged to make use of office hours when instructors are guaranteed to be waiting for you. Appointments for meetings outside of regular office hours are also possible.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following four items:

Midterm exam (25%) [Oct 27]
Final exam (35%) [Dec 19]
Data project (20%) [due Oct 17]
Section attendance and participation (5%)
Lecture “spot checks” (5%)
Extracurricular activity (10%) [due dates vary]

The two exams will be taken in class and will involve a combination of short answers and brief essays. The data project will be a take-home exercise in which you forecast the outcome of the 2018 congressional elections. Section attendance and participation will be tracked by your TA. The spot checks will be random in-class activities in which students reflect on the day’s material (and show that they are present in lecture). The extracurricular activity will be engagement in an experience outside of class that is likely to include the following opportunities: participating in an election day research study, serving as a poll worker, attending the Elections Research Center’s symposium, or attending an approved debate viewing event or film screening. (You are also free to take part in these opportunities voluntarily!) More details about the extracurricular options will be provided later.
The grading scale is as follows:

- **A** = 93-100%
- **AB** = 88-92.9%
- **B** = 83-87.9%
- **BC** = 78-82.9%
- **C** = 70-77.9%
- **D** = 60-69.9%
- **F** = 0-59.9%

Your success in this class is important to me. 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.

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

Please only use electronic devices in class for referencing course materials, taking notes, and occasionally tracking down online items that are necessary for our discussions. Everything else should be quieted and stowed away for later use.

Classes are formatted mostly as lectures, although your questions and feedback are warmly welcomed. I encourage you to be actively involved in both lectures and section meetings. Slides presented in class will be posted to the course web site at the end of each unit so that you can review them.
Tentative Schedule

Sept 5, 10, 12, & 17  **The Role of the Voter in a Democracy**
                      PBAE [chapter 1 and p. 206-224]
                      Lupia, “How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence”
                      Schaffner & Luks, “Misinformation or Expressive Responding?”

Sept 19, 24, & 26  **Voter Turnout**
                     PBAE [chapter 3]
                     Wattenberg, “Where Have All the Young Voters Gone?”

Oct 1, 3, & 8  **Congressional Elections**
                PBME [whole book]
                Erikson and Wright, “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections”

Oct 10*, 15, 17, & 22  **Partisanship and Polarization**
                        PBAE [chapters 4 & 5]
                        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 Rapid Partisans”
                        Data project due in class on Oct 17

Oct 24  **Midterm exam**

Oct 29, Oct 31, & Nov 5  **Election Laws and Administration**
                         PBAE [p. 276-282]
                         Stewart, “A Voter’s Eye View of the 2012 Election”
                         MIT Election Lab, “Voting Technology”

Nov 6  Election Day activities

Nov 7  **2018 election analysis**

Nov 12, 14, & 19  **Explaining the Vote**
                   PBAE [chapter 8]
                   Gelman et al., “Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What’s the Matter with Connecticut?”
                   Mutz, “Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote”
Nov 21  No class due to Thanksgiving holiday

Nov 26 & 28  **Swing Voters and Economic Accountability**  
PBAE [p. 36-41]  
Mayer, “The Disappearing – but Still Important – Swing Voter”  
Sides, Tessler, and Vavreck, “The Electoral Landscape of 2016”

Dec 3 & 5  **Candidates and Issues**  
PBAE [chapter 6]  
Petrocik, “Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study”

Dec 7  Election Research Center Symposium

Dec 10 & 12  **Presidential Nominations**  
PBAE [p. 234-237]  
Cohen et al., “Party Versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System”

Dec 19  **Final exam (7:25pm-9:25pm)**