

PSC215

Fall 2016

Hutch 473, 11:05-12:20 T-Th

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## American Elections

We will study American elections: presidential, congressional and state primary and general elections. In particular, we will look at how the institutions and rules that structure this process shape the decisions of candidates, voters and activists. Finally, we will look at the policy representation that emerges from these electoral processes.

This year, we'll focus on the presidential primaries and caucuses that will take place during the semester.

There will be a midterm and a final. Class attendance is expected and grades will reflect participation, primarily in class. Be sure to complete the assigned readings by the first date listed for each on the syllabus—the lectures will assume you have done the readings.

**Office Hours:** Thursday 1:15-2:30, other times available by email request.

### Text:

Sides, Shaw, Grossman and Litsitz *Campaigns and Elections* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

Other readings will be available on Blackboard or by email. The text will provide much of the basic material for the course. It will be supplemented by additional political science readings. And there will also be current material, often from online sources about the electoral process.

NOTE: As I add new/replace material on the syllabus, I will update the readings on Blackboard or send you a link by email.

### Grading:

You are encouraged to discuss course readings, assignments, and exam questions from prior years with your fellow students. However, all written work that is handed in must be done independently and not in collaboration with another.

Class Participation	10%
Midterm Exam, in class March 17	40%
Final Wednesday, December 21, 1600	50%

### Writing section students:

Class Participation	10%
Midterm Exam	35%

Final Friday, May 6, 8:30 AM 40%  
Paper 15%

There will be a separate email sent to W students about the paper requirements.

**Introduction.** Sept 1 (Th)

**Partisanship—Voters and Electorates.** Sep 6 (T) and Sep 8 (Th)

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 2, 12 & 13.

[2] [Kondik, Skelley and Sabato](#), “The 2016 Results We Can Already Predict” *Politico* May 3, 2015.

[3] [Feller, Gelman and Shor](#), “Red State/Blue State Divisions in the 2012 Presidential Election” *The Forum*, 2012, 10(4): 127-131.

Conspiracy Theories:

[4] [Uscinski, Joseph](#), The Five Most Dangerous Conspiracy Theories of 2016, Aug 22, *Politico Magazine*.

What is the Alt-Right?

[5] “[The Alt-Right’s Dark Army of Racist Trolls Just Had a Great Day](#)” *Wired*

[6] From the Alt-Right perspective: “[An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right](#)” *Breitbart*

[7] [Robinson](#), “The Ugliest, Most Appalling Spectacle in American Politics” *Washington Post*, Sept

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

What does the term turnout mean and why should we care about levels of turnout?

What do we mean by party identification?

How do voters use party identification?

Do voters know enough to vote for the candidate who best represents their views? Can party identification help?

Now let’s think about the partisanship of constituencies. For example, we talk about red states and blue states. Why is it important to understand such aggregate partisanship as well as individual level partisanship?

What are the schisms in the Republican party? Why are so many Republicans not supporting Trump?

To what extent is politics becoming more “fact free”? How central are conspiracy theories to this year’s presidential campaign?

What is the Alt-Right?

**House Districts, Apportionment and Redistricting.** Sep 13 (T) Sep 15 (Th).

Read the first 5 for Tuesday, the rest for the following Th.

[1] Streb, *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*, Ch 7.

[2] Masket, Winburn & Wright “The Gerrymanderers are Coming! Legislative Redistricting Won’t Affect Competition or Polarization Much, No Matter Who Does It.” *PS* Jan. 2012.

- [3] [Chen and Rodden](#), 2013 “Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*.
- [4] [Wang](#), “The Great Gerrymander of 2012,” *NYT* Feb 2, 2013
- [5] [Sides and McGhee](#), “Redistricting didn’t win Republicans the House” *Washington Post Wonkblog* Feb 17, 2013.
- [6] Rutenberg, “Block the Vote”, *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 20, 2015.
- Evenwel v Abbott*: [4] [Livingston](#), “Texas Redistricting Case Could Have National Effect” Dec 8, 2015. *The Texas Tribune*.
- [7] [Pildes](#) “Symposium: Misguided hysteria over *Evenwel v. Abbot*” *SCOTUSblog*
- [8] [Hasan](#) “Symposium: Ideology, partisanship, and the new “one person, one vote” case” *SCOTUSblog*
- [9] [Petry](#) “Redistricting Reform Gains Momentum in 2016” *Brennan Center for Justice NYU School of Law*

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

What is redistricting and why should we care about it?

Who does redistricting? Why does it matter?

What is gerrymandering? For the country as a whole, does either party gain a net advantage because of gerrymandering?

Do geographic residential patterns of voters constrain gerrymandering?

Do commissions produce “better” redistricting? What might better mean?

In what ways other than redistricting do elected officials try to “choose their voters”?

What is the fight about in *Evenwel v Abbott*?

**House and Senate Primary Elections.** Sep 20 (T) Sep 22 (Th) Sep 27 (T).

**Read 1 thru 5 for the 20<sup>th</sup> and 6 thru 8 for the 27<sup>th</sup>.**

- [1] *Campaigns and Elections*, Ch 10, pp 274-286.
- [2] [Boatwright](#), “No Primaries Aren’t Destroying Politics.” *Politico* Feb. 18, 2014.
- [3] Bawn, Cohen, Karol, Masket, Noel and Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics" *Perspectives on Politics*, 2012.
- [4] Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism" *Perspectives on Politics*, 2011.
- [5] [Schneider](#), “Huelskamp loses GOP primary after ideological battle” *Politico* 8/2/2016.
- [6] [Intorcio](#), “How Does California’s “Top Two” Primary Law Compare to Primary Elections in Other States?” *The Thicket*, the blog of the National Conference of State Legislators, June 30, 2010.
- [7] [Caen](#), “The Consequences of California’s Top-Two Primary.” *The Atlantic*, Dec 29, 2015.
- [8] [The Times Editorial Board](#), “California’s top-two primary: Don’t judge too quickly.” *LA Times*, February 9, 2015.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

What is a primary?

What are closed and open primaries? Do open primaries tend to nominate different kinds of candidates than closed? If so how are they different and why? What are the other pros and cons of these two general types?

Why do so few incumbents typically lose in primaries? When are they defeated?

How can we identify the “best” primary rules to use?

**Presidential Primaries and Caucuses.** Sep 29 (Th) and Oct 4 (T).

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 9, pp 236-252.

[2] [Putnam](#), “Everything you need to know about how the presidential primary works” *Monkey Cage* May 12, 2015.

[3] [NYT Presidential Primary Calendar](#)

[4] [Frontloading HQ Presidential Primary Calendar](#)—the details

[5] [NYT 2016 Presidential Primary Results](#)

[6] [WSJ Geographic Map 2016 Presidential Primary Results](#)

[7] [Bycoffe](#), “The Endorsement Primary” 538.com

[8] Real Clear Politics: [Republican](#) and [Democratic](#) current nomination poll results.

[9] [Center for Responsive Politics](#), Presidential nomination fundraising.

[10] Byron Shafer and Amber Wichowsky “Institutional Structure and Democratic Values: A Research Note on a Natural Experiment” *The Forum* Vol 7 Issue 2 2009.

[11] Brian Arbour “Even Closer, Even Longer: What If the 2008 Democratic Primary Used Republican Rules?” *The Forum* Vol 7 Issue 2 2009.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

What factors do potential presidential candidates think about when deciding whether or not to run? Think about the ones that are personal to them, as well as the features of the electoral landscape that will shape the decisions of any potential candidate.

What are “core supporters” and why are they important?

How do caucuses work?

What are the pros and cons of caucuses versus primaries?

What is frontloading and what are its pros and cons?

In the period before the actual presidential primaries and caucuses were held, “the invisible primary,” which candidates held the polling lead, raised the most money and/or had the most endorsements?

Describe the arguments for and against a few small states, such as IA and NH being allowed to hold their nomination contests before the rest of the states. Have these states contributed to or detracted from a democratic presidential nomination process?

In what ways does the sequence of primaries matter?

In what ways were this year’s primaries different or the same compared to 2008 or 2012 primaries? Why so?

**General Elections—Presidential.** Oct 6 (Th) and Oct 11 (T)

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 5, Ch 9 pp 252-273;

[2] Streb, *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*, Ch 9.

[3] Wasserman “How Demographics Will Shape the 2016 Election”  
FiveThirtyEightPolitics Dec 3, 2015.

[4] Huang, Taofang, and Daron Shaw. 2009 “Beyond the Battlegrounds? Electoral College Strategies in the 2008 Presidential Election.” *Journal of Political Marketing*, [Volume 8 Issue 4 pp 272-291.]

[5] Goldstein, Ken, Matthew Dallek and Joel Rivlin. 2014. “Even the Geeks are Polarized: The Dispute over the 'Real Driver' in American Elections” [The Forum, Vol 12 Issue 2.]

[6] [NYT Upshot Polls](#)

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

How does the Electoral College work?

What are the pros and cons of the Electoral College?

Streb discusses arguments about amending or abolishing the Electoral College. What are your thoughts about his arguments?

What choices do presidential candidates make in campaigning?

How does the Electoral College affect how they allocate their resources?

**Review for Midterm (Oct 13), Fall Break (Oct 18) Midterm (Oct 20).**

**Measuring Public Opinion—What Does Polling Reveal? Oct 25 (T)**

[1] [Hillygus](#), “The Evolution of Election Polling in the United States.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2011.

[2] [Five Thirty Eight](#). Pollster Ratings

[3] [Sides](#), “Do Early Polls Predict Anything?” *The Monkey Cage, Washington Post*, May 25, 2011.

[4] [NYT Upshot Polls](#)

[5] [Irwin](#), “How is the Economy Doing? It may depend on your party and \$1”, The Upshot, NYT, Jan 1, 2016.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

Who uses polling and why?

Why should we care about polling?

Why do poll results vary so much? How is it possible for one firm to report one candidate is ahead 54% to 40% while another reports that they are tied?

How can you evaluate the quality of a poll that is reported?

How honest are the answers in a poll?

Look at the over-time chart for presidential job approval, congressional job approval, generic congressional vote and direction of country on Real Clear Politics, 538.com, NYT or any similar website.

**Legislative General Elections—The Incumbency Advantage in Elections. Oct 27 (Th) Nov 1 (T).**

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 10, pp 286-301.

[2] James E. Campbell “The Midterm Landslide of 2010: A Triple Wave Election”

[3] Jeffrey M. Stonecash “The 2010 Elections: Party Pursuits, Voter Perceptions, and the Chancy Game of Politics”

[4] Zachary Courser “The Tea Party at the Election” [2] thru [4] in *The Forum* Vol 8 Issue 4, 2010.

[5] [Sabato predictions for 2016](#)

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

First class:

Why do legislative incumbents have an advantage in running for reelection? Consider both their advantage in primaries and in general elections. How many lost primaries in 2014?

Why is the reelection rate of Senators less than that of House members?

Second class:

What factors seem to explain changes in the balance of Republicans and Democrats in Congress in both midterm and presidential years?

What are some of the different approaches to predicting net changes in the House and Senate elections?

**Election Results: What Happened and Why?** Nov 3 (Th).

Read discussions of the outcomes for the Presidency and Congress and think about how these fit or do not fit the theories from the course.

**Money in Elections.** Nov 8 (T) Nov 10 (Th).

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 4.

[2] [Streb, Matthew J.](#) *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Chapter 10: Campaign Finance.

[3] Powell, "The Influence of Campaign Contributions on Legislative Policy" *The Forum*, 2013.

[4] [Kalla and Broockman](#) 2015. “Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment”

[5] Sunlight Foundation Blog, Yaeger “The difference between super PACs and dark money groups” October 30, 2015.

[6] [Center for Responsive Politics](#). 2016 Presidential Race. Be sure to click the links in the left hand column.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

First class:

Why do we care about campaign contributions?

Does money matter? Does it affect who runs for office? Does money affect election outcomes? Does money shape public policy?

How should the concept of money as free speech be weighed against the potentially corrupting influence of money? Should it be limited or regulated?

What did the Supreme Court decide in Citizens United?

Should contributions to candidates be disclosed publicly?

Who gives contributions to candidates? Why do they give? Do donors get anything in return?

Streb argues that we should not limit the amount of contributions given to candidates.

What is his argument? What might be counter arguments?

### **Mass Media/Internet in Elections. Nov 15 (T)**

*Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 8;

Iyengar “The Media Game: New Moves, Old Strategies” *The Forum* Vol 9 Issue 1, 2011

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

How has technology changed media use?

Should we be concerned about the decline of the traditional print media?

Do you think the media is biased? If so, how and why?

How can we measure bias?

Do changes in our media usage relate to polarization? To the rise of the tea party movement?

### **State and Local Elections. Nov 17 (Th).**

*Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 11.

Initiatives, Referenda and Recall. Nov 22 (T).

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 4

Bowler and Donovan, “Direct Democracy in the United States” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. Reading will be on Blackboard.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

What do the following terms mean: initiative, referendum, recall.

Identify an example of one of them in the election and discuss the result.

What are the pros and cons of these electoral mechanisms.

Thanksgiving Nov 24

### **Culture War & Ideological Polarization. Nov 29 (T) and Dec 1 (Th).**

Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. “Is Polarization a Myth?” *Journal of Politics* 70:542-555.

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel A. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2008. “Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings.” *Journal of Politics* 70:556-560.

What is Abramowitz’s argument?

What is Fiorina's counter argument?  
Why should we care about polarization between the parties?  
Why did polarization happen?  
What can we do about it?

**Representation. Dec 6 (T)**

[Gillens, Martin](#). 2012. *Affluence and Influence*.

[Gillens, Bartels, Schlozman, Rosenblum, Yglesias, Schmitt, Ferejohn](#). "Under the Influence" Forum, *Boston Review*, July 1, 2012.

Page, Bartels and Seawright, "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans", *Perspectives on Politics* 2013.

Hetherington, Marc. 2015. "Why Polarized Trust Matters." The Forum, Oct. 2015.

What are some of the different meanings of political representation?  
Why does representation matter?  
What are the concerns about the effects of inequality of resources on representation?  
Why has trust declined and what are the consequences?

Dec 8 TBD

**Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam. Dec 13 (T)**  
*Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 14.