

PSC215
Morey 205, 11:05-12:20 T-Th
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Spring 2014

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.

There will be a midterm and a final. Class attendance is expected and grades will reflect participation.

Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 1:30-2:30, other times available by email request.

Texts:

Sides and Vavreck, *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election*, 2013, Princeton

Wayne, *The Road to the White House 2012*, Wadsworth

Streb, *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*, Routledge

Other readings will be available electronically or by email

NOTE: As new material appears, I will update the readings on Blackboard or by email.

Grading:

Class Participation	15%
Midterm Exam	40%
Final Fri. May 9 8:30 AM	45%

Introduction. Jan 16 (Th)

Partisanship—Voters and Electorates. Jan 21 (T) & Jan 23 (Th)

Sides & Vavreck, Ch 1; Wayne, Ch 3 and Ch 10 pp 349-352; Streb, Ch 2 and 3;

Hanmer, "Turnout in the 2012 Election: A Review and Call for Long-Term Solutions" *The Forum*, 2013.

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

For the first class:

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

Find one online article or discussion of voter ID laws? Why do they matter?

For the second class:

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. Look up the profile for one state on 538.com. The Political Geography series is scattered through the blog. (Just google "538.com political geography".) Why does it matter if a state or house district is red or blue?

House Districts, Apportionment and Redistricting. Jan 28 (T).

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 7.

Michael Cooper and Jennifer Medina, "Battles to Shape Maps, and Congress, Go to Courts" *New York Times*, October 22, 2011

McGhee, "The Effect of Redistricting on House Elections, Revisited" in *The Monkey Cage*, a *Washington Post Blog*, October 15, 2012.

Nicholas R. Seabrook "The Limits of Partisan Gerrymandering: Looking Ahead to the 2010 Congressional Redistricting Cycle" *The Forum* Vol 8 Issue 2, 2010.

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? What is the California process?

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

House and Senate Primary Elections. Jan 30 (Th) and Feb 4 (T).

Maisel and Brewer, Chapter 6 in *Parties and Elections in America*, Fifth Edition.

Bawn, Cohen, Karol, Masket, Noel and Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics" *Perspectives on Politics*, 2012.

Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism" *Perspectives on Politics*, 2011.

Also read two articles: How Does California's "Top Two" Primary Law Compare to Primary Elections in Other States? By Tom Intorcio, June 30, 2010 in *The Thicket*, the blog of the National Conference of State Legislators.

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? Are there other pros and cons of these two general types?

Why do so few incumbents typically lose in primaries?

Presidential Primary Elections. Feb 11 (T) and Feb 13 (Th).

Sides and Vavreck, Ch 2-4, Wayne, Ch 4 and Ch 5; Streb, Rethinking Ch 8.

Byron Shafer and Amber Wichowsky "Institutional Structure and Democratic Values: A Research Note on a Natural Experiment" and

Brian Arbour "Even Closer, Even Longer: What If the 2008 Democratic Primary Used Republican Rules?" both in *The Forum* Vol 7 Issue 2 2009.

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

For the first class:

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?

For the second class:

In the period before the actual presidential primaries and caucuses were held, “the invisible primary,” which Republican candidates held the polling lead? Can you explain this result?

From Wayne: Party officials in IA and NH strongly objected to the changes in the Democratic caucus and primary schedule for 2008. 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 so different from the 2008 primaries? Why is this the case?

Money in Elections. Feb 18 (T) Feb 20 (Th).

Wayne, Chapter 2 Campaign Finance and Ch 10 pp 342-346;

Streb, Rethinking Ch 10.

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

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?

Second class:

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?

Measuring Public Opinion—What Does Polling Reveal? Feb 25 (T) & Feb 27 (Th)
Erikson and Tedin, Chapter 2 in *American Public Opinion* 8th ed.

Read two brief articles on The Monkey Cage, Washington Post: <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/11/07/a-second-look-at-national-pollster-accuracy/> and <http://themonkeycage.org/2011/05/25/do-early-polls-predict-anything/>.

Look at the over time chart for presidential job approval, congressional job approval, generic congressional vote and direction of country on www.realclearpolitics.com or any similar website.

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?

Legislative General Elections—The Incumbency Advantage in Elections. Mar 4 (T)
Mar 6 (Th).

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

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

Zachary Courser “The Tea Party at the Election” All 3 in *The Forum* Vol 8 Issue 4, 2010.

CQ Weekly Reports (available under databases through library portal): Read any single articles related to how incumbents serve constituency interests. Use the search engine. Unfortunately, CQ is writing much shorter articles so the older ones are often the most interesting.

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For the second class read the 3 Monkey Cage posts: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/12/04/there-is-no-wave-coming-in-the-2014-election/> ; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/27/republicans-have-a-44-chance-of-taking-the-senate-but-it-may-be-much-higher/> ; and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/07/politico-mocks-and-then-agrees-with-our-senate-forecast/>

Also read the following 3 posts: <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/2014-house-forecast-update-no-wave-in-sight/> ; http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/20/can-republicans-win-the-senate-in-2014/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0 ;

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hey-its-an-election-year-heres-what-2014-will-bring/2013/12/29/cfd99ab2-7095-11e3-8def-a33011492df2_story.html

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 2012?

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 the different approaches to predicting net changes in the House and Senate elections?

The Electoral College & Review. Mar 18 (T)

Wayne, pp 3-5, 13-24, 228-231, 352-363;

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 9.

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?

First Hourly Exam: Mar 20. (Th)

General Elections—Presidential. Mar 25 (T) and Mar 27 (Th)

Wayne, Ch 7 Organization, Strategy and Tactics and Chapter 9 Understanding Presidential Elections.

Sides & Vavreck: Ch 5 thru 7.

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

First class:

What choices do presidential candidates make in campaigning?

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

Second class:

What happened in the 2012 elections?

What choices did the candidates make?

Was the polling correct? If not, where did polling miss?
What was turnout? In what ways did this matter?
What demographic groups supported each presidential candidate?
What issues were most important in the campaign?
Why best explains the outcomes of the elections? Use the course to understand what occurred?

Initiatives and Referenda. April 1 (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.

Minor Parties and Independent Candidates. April 8 (T).

Barry Burden "Minor parties and strategic voting in recent US presidential elections" *Electoral Studies*, 2005.

Morton Ch 14. Reading will be on Blackboard.

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

Why might we care about how well 3rd parties or independent candidates fare in our system?

When we focus on general elections, we are usually discussing races with two candidates? What issues of representation does having 3 or more candidates raise. Here because of the small number of 3 candidate races, you may also think about primary elections.

What might be the pros or cons of nonpartisan elections? Look up information about the Nebraska legislature? Is it actually nonpartisan?

Mass Media/Internet in Elections. April 10 (Th) April 15 (T)

Wayne, Ch 8 Media Politics;

Hillygus "Campaign Effects on Vote Choice" Chapter 18 in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. Reading will be on Blackboard.

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:

What media sources did you use to follow the 2012 elections?

Were you contacted by any candidate, party or advocacy group during the election? If so, how?

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?

Culture War & Ideological Polarization. April 17 (Th) and April 22 (T).

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?

Find a poll on a politically important issue that compares the attitudes of one of the following: Democrats to Republicans, old to young, one religion to another or to none, men to women or any similar demographic. How do the poll results relate to the debate on polarization?

Why should we care about polarization between the parties?

Why did polarization happen?

What can we do about it?

Representation. April 24 (Th)

Hetherington, Ch 7; Gillens chapter. (Both will be on blackboard).

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

What is the doctrine of responsible parties, eg as outlined by Hetherington? Hetherington also discusses how our institutions of government affect party organizations. Explain his argument (or that of others).

How strong are our parties today?

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?

Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam. April 29 (T)
Sides & Vavreck, Chapter 8.