

PSC215
TR 11:05-12:20 Morey 525 Spring 2018
Professor L. Powell lynda.powell@rochester.edu

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 class participation will affect close calls on the final grade. 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: T-Th 1:15-2:15, other times available by email request.

Text:

Sides, Shaw, Grossman and Litsitz *Campaigns and Elections* 2nd 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:

Midterm Exam, March 8th	40%
Final Thursday May 10th, 10AM (1.5 hrs)	60%

Writing section students: Paper 15%

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

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.

Introduction. January 18 (Th)

Partisanship—Voters and Electorates. Jan 23 (T) and Jan 25 (Th)

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

[2] [Sides, Tesler and Vavreck](#). *Identity Crisis*, The Electoral Landscape of 2016. On blackboard

[3] [Rhodes, Schaffner and McElwee](#) “Is America More Divided by Race or Class? Race, Income, and Attitudes among Whites, African Americans, and Latinos” *The Forum*, 2017.

[4] [Inglehart and Norris](#), “[Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties](#): The Silent Revolution in Reverse” *Perspectives in Politics* 2017.

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

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?

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. Jan 30 (T) Feb 1 (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] [Wang](#), “The Great Gerrymander of 2012,” *NYT* Feb 2, 2013

[4] [Sides and McGhee](#), “Redistricting didn’t win Republicans the House” *Washington Post Wonkblog* Feb 17, 2013.

[5] [Petry](#) “Redistricting Reform Gains Momentum in 2016” *Brennan Center for Justice NYU School of Law*

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

[7] [Hajnal, Ijevardi and Nielson](#), “Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes” *Journal of Politics* 2017

[8] [Rutenberg](#), “Block the Vote”, *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 20, 2015.

[9] [Howe](#), “Argument preview: Justices to consider Ohio voter-purge practices” *Scotusblog* 2018.

[10] [Howe](#), “Argument preview: The justices tackle partisan gerrymandering again” *Scotusblog* 2017

[11] [McGhee](#), “The efficiency gap is a measure, not a test” *Scotusblog* 2017.

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?
What is the fight about in the Wisconsin and Ohio cases before the court?
In what ways other than redistricting do elected officials try to “choose their voters”?

House and Senate Primary Elections. Feb 6 (T) Feb 8 (Th)

- [1] *Campaigns and Elections*, Ch 10, pp 274-286.
- [2] [Boatwright](#), “No Primaries Aren’t Destroying Politics.” Politico Feb. 18, 2014.
- [3] [Schneider](#), “Huelskamp loses GOP primary after ideological battle” Politico 8/2/2016.
- [4] [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.
- [5] [Caen](#), “The Consequences of California’s Top-Two Primary.” *The Atlantic*, Dec 29, 2015.
- [6] [The Times Editorial Board](#), “California’s top-two primary: Don’t judge too quickly.” *LA Times*, February 9, 2015.
- [7] [McGhee and Shor](#), “Has the Top-Two Primary Elected More Moderates?” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2017
- [8] [Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez](#), “The Koch Network and Republican Party Extremism” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2017.

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. Feb 13 (T) and Feb 15 (Th).

- [1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 9, pp 236-252.
- [2] [Sides, Tesler and Vavreck](#), Chapters 3-6. On blackboard. (read this for Thursday).
- [3] [Putnam](#), “Everything you need to know about how the presidential primary works” *Monkey Cage* May 12, 2015.
- [4] [Byron Shafer and Amber Wichowsky](#) “Institutional Structure and Democratic Values: A Research Note on a Natural Experiment” *The Forum* Vol 7 Issue 2 2009.
- [5] [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?

What happened in the 2016 Republican and Democratic primaries? How does electoral theory based on the other readings help us understand these events?

Legislative General Elections. Feb 20(T) Feb 22 (Th).

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

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

[3] [Smith](#) “Early election forecast: Republicans could lose 38 seats and house majority” *Monkey Cage, Washington Post*

[4] [Enten](#), “The Democrats’ Wave Could Turn Into a Flood” *FiveThirtyEight*

[5] [Abramowitz](#) “Partisan Gerrymandering and the Outlook for the 2018 U.S. House Elections” *Rasmussen Reports* 2017

[6] [Clarke and Jenkins](#), “Who are President Trump’s Allies in the House of Representatives?” *The Forum*

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

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?

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?

General Elections—Presidential. Feb 27 (T) and Mar 1 (Th)

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

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

[3] [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.]

- [4] [Sides, Tesler and Vavreck](#) “The 2016 U.S. Election: How Trump Lost and Won” *Journal of Democracy* 2017
- [5] [Schaffner, MacWilliams and Nteta](#), “Explaining White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism”
- [4] [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.]
- [5] [DiSalvo and Stonecash](#), “Populism in the 2016 Presidential Election” The Forum, 2016.
- [6] [Nate Silver](#), The Real Story of 2016, *FiveThirtyEight*
- [7] [Cook](#), “The 2016 Presidential Vote: A Look Down in the Weeds” *Sabato's Crystal Ball*

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?

What factors may have mattered in the 2016 general elections?

March 6th Catch up and Review for Midterm

March 8th Midterm

March 13th -15th Spring Break

Money in Elections. March 20 (T) March 22 (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” [hotlink to article in the American Journal of Political Science]

[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.

[7] [Miller](#) “Cooperative Media Spending in Senate Campaigns Post-Citizens United” in *The Forum* 2017.

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

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. March 27 (T)

[1] *Campaigns & Elections*, Ch 8

[2] [Faris, Roberts, Etling, Bourassa, Zuckerman and Benkler](#), “Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election” 2017

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:
What role did media play in the 2016 elections?
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?

State and Local Elections. March 29 (Th).

Campaigns & Elections, Ch 11.

Initiatives, Referenda and Recall. April 3 (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 2016 election and discuss the result.
What are the pros and cons of these electoral mechanisms.

April 5 Class cancelled.

Culture War & Ideological Polarization. April 10 (T) and April 12 (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. April 17 (T)

[Gillens, Martin](#). 2012. *Affluence and Influence*, ch 3.

[Gilens, 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?

Democracy for Realists April 19 (Th)

[Achen and Bartels](#) *Democracy for Realists*, 2016 Chapter 8. On Blackboard

April 24 (T) TBD

April 26 (Th) presentation by W section authors and discussion of 2018 midterm prospects.

Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam. May 1 (T)
Campaigns & Elections, Ch 14.