

PSC215  
Gavett 312, 12:30-1:45 M-W  
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Fall 2012

## American Elections

We will study presidential and Congressional primary and general elections, with additional brief discussions of Gubernatorial and state legislative elections. The course focuses on the institutions and rules that structure these contests, and we will examine how the rules and institutions 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:** Monday and Wednesday 2-3, and by arrangement.

### Texts:

Wayne, *The Road to the White House 2012*, Wadsworth  
Streb, *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*, Routledge  
Heterington and Larson *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed CQ  
Other readings will be available electronically.

NOTE: As new material appears, I will be updating these readings to better reflect the current campaign.

### Writing Section:

Students who are registered for the writing section of the course must write a term paper of 10-15 pages (about 3500 words). Term paper assignment: Choose a **House** district in 2012, which had at least one primary election that involved two or more candidates. Discuss the influences of district partisanship and incumbency on candidate emergence, and candidate quality in both primaries. What other factors, redistricting etc were involved and what effects did they have on the primary election? How did these factors influence the result of the general election? Papers are due the last day of class, December 12. A 3 page draft is due 4 weeks earlier in class, November 14. Also the paper will count 10% for W students.

### Grading:

### Writing Section

Class Participation	15%	10%
Midterm Exam	40%	38%
Final Mon. December 17 7:15 PM	45%	42%
Paper		10%

**Introduction.** Sep 5 (W)

**Partisanship—Voters and Electorates.** Sep 10 (M) & Sep 12 (W)

Wayne, Ch 3 and Ch 10 pp 349-352; Streb, *Rethinking*, Ch 2 and 3; Hetherington Ch 6, Michael P. McDonald “Voter Turnout in the 2010 Midterm Election” *The Forum* Vol 8 Issue 4, 2010.

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?

What do you think has been the most important campaign or political event this last week? IF THERE ARE IMPORTANT CURRENT EVENTS, THIS QUESTION WILL BE RELEVANT IN ANY CLASS.

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. (Eg South Dakota was on August 24)

Why does it matter if a state or house district is red or blue?

**House Districts, Apportionment and Redistricting.** Sep 17 (M).

Streb, *Rethinking*, Ch 7.

Charles S. Bullock III, *Redistricting*, Ch 1.

Theodore S. Arrington “Redistricting in the U.S.: A Review of Scholarship and Plan for Future Research” and Nicholas R. Seabrook “The Limits of Partisan Gerrymandering: Looking Ahead to the 2010 Congressional Redistricting Cycle” both in *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.** Sep 19 (W) and Sep 24 (M).

Hetherington, Ch 3 pp 71-77.

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

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; and the article in *Campaigns & Elections* (available from Lexis-Nexis through the library portal) "Three Davids, No Goliath and Plenty of Slingshots" Kristin Brainerd September 1999. This article discusses one House campaign. Note in particular the limited ability of leaders to constrain candidate entry, and also the unique character of Louisiana's election structure and, for future reference, the discussion of the general election campaign. Finally, read one article on a 2010 or 2012 primary, such as, "The 60<sup>th</sup> Democrat" by Michael Sokolove, *NYT Magazine*, August 22, 2010.

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?

Roughly how many incumbent members of Congress lost in this year's primaries? Why do so few typically lose?

**Presidential Primary Elections.** Sep 26 (W) and Oct 1 (M).

Wayne, Ch 4 and Ch 5; Streb, *Rethinking* Ch 8 and Hetherington Ch 3 pp 78-108.

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?" and

Alan Siaroff "How Barack Obama's Votes Beat Hillary Clinton's Votes in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Contest: Not Malapportionment, But Turnout Variation and the Florida Effect" All 3 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.** Oct 3 (W) Oct 10 (W).

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

Streb, Rethinking Ch 10 and Hetherington Ch 4.

"A Collapse of the Campaign Finance Regime?" Thomas Mann, "From Bad to Worse: The Unraveling of the Campaign Finance System." Raymond La Raja and "Rethinking the Campaign Finance Agenda." Michael Malbin all in *The Forum*, April 9, 2008. Adam Liptak, "Justices, 5-4 Reject Corporate Spending Limit" NYT January 21, 2010.

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?** Oct 15 (M) & Oct 17 (W)

Erikson and Tedin, Chapter 2 in *American Public Opinion* 8<sup>th</sup> ed.

Look at the over time chart for presidential job approval, congressional job approval, generic congressional vote and direction of country on [www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com) or any similar website. Read David Brooks column "The Tea Party Teens in the NYT," <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/05/opinion/05brooks.html>

And a response on the Daily Beast [www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-01-11/in-defense-of-tea-parties/?cid=bs:archive1](http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-01-11/in-defense-of-tea-parties/?cid=bs:archive1)

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

Who uses polling?

If we are interested in elections, 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.** Oct 22 (M)  
Oct 24 (W)

James E. Campgell “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 two articles related to how incumbents serve constituency interests. Older articles you might choose from include: “Incumbency,” Feb. 8, 1997; “Setting Up a Congressional Shop Back Home” March 2, 1985; “CQ ROUNDTABLE: Hill's Growth Industry: Constituent Service”, June 25, 1994; “Byrd: Different Expectations?” June 9, 2001; “Pork: A Time-Honored Tradition Lives On,” Oct. 24, 1987. Aug. 14, 2006 for example had an article on the honey lobby.

There are newer relevant articles in *CQ Weekly Reports*. Scan recent issues to find one or use the search engine. Unfortunately, *CQ* is writing much shorter articles so the older are actually the most interesting.

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 this year?

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 does one model predict for this year. Eg. Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight blog on the NYT. Can you find others?

**First Hourly Exam:** Oct 29. (M)

**The Electoral College.** Oct 31 (W)

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

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 9; and Hetherington pp 49-54.

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?

**General Elections—Presidential.** Nov 5 (M) and Nov 7 (W)

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

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?

Have the debates been important in the campaign? How so?

What are your predictions for tomorrow? What are they based on?

Second class:

What happened in the elections?

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.** Nov 12 (M)

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 4

Bowler and Donovan, "Direct Democracy in the United States" in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*.

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.

**Counting and Casting Ballots.** Nov 14 (W).

Streb, Rethinking Ch 5 and 6.

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

In what ways does ballot design matter?

What are the different voting machines? Why do the different methods of voting matter?

Are there issues to access we should think about?

Were there accusations in this election that the electoral laws advantaged or disadvantaged one party relative to another or one demographic group over another?

**Minor Parties and Independent Candidates.** Nov 19 (M).

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

Morton Ch 14.

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

Why might we care about how well 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.** Nov 26 (M) and Nov 28 (W)

Wayne, Ch 8 Media Politics;

Hillygus “Campaign Effects on Vote Choice” Chapter 18 in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*.

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 have you used to follow the 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.** Dec 3 (M) and Dec 5 (W).

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.** Dec 10 (M)

Hetherington, Ch 7.

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?

**Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam.** Dec 12 (W)