

Voting Behaviors and Elections

Political Science 227

Spring 2008

(M W F: 12:00-12:50 at 367 BSB)

Instructor: Dukhong Kim

Office Hours: M W: 1:30-2:30 or by appointment

Contact Information

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Prerequisite: Pols101 (Introduction to American Government)

Course Description

This class aims to understand Americans' voting behavior and elections. Specifically it focuses on institutional conditions that help or hinder citizens' participation in the election process as well as individual level factors that explain citizens' electoral choices and participation in elections. To comprehend the full picture of individuals' voting behavior, it is necessary to understand the interaction between political institutions and individuals. Thus, this class will examine various factors that influence individuals' voting by using both qualitative (e.g., historical and sociological) and quantitative perspectives. The first part of the class will focus on the development of suffrage in America and how political institutions constrain or assist citizens' participation in election processes. The second part of the class will focus on understanding individuals' voting behavior. Major themes that we examine from the studies are : what factors foster individuals' participation in voting; what role partisanship, information, campaigns, and mobilization efforts play in explaining individuals' voting preferences; and what affects individuals' attachment to parties. We will examine various approaches to answer these questions: economic, social, psychological, political, and historical.

Teaching format: The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion; but my lecture will be limited to giving you a general description of the topics. The major parts of this class will be based on your active participation in the discussion, which means that you need to read the materials thoroughly, bring in interesting discussion issues, and engage in productive discussions with your classmates.

Evaluation: Grades will be determined as follows.

Midterm exam (20%)

Final exam (25%)

Paper (30%)

Participation/presentation (25%)

Exams: There will be two exams - midterm and final. Both exams will include short identification and essay questions. The final will be cumulative, but will be weighted toward the topics covered after the midterm. The questions will be drawn from the readings.

Paper: Each student must write a research paper on the questions that he/she chooses. Students can choose any methods - quantitative or qualitative - in addressing their research questions as long as the topics are related to voting behavior and elections in the United States. The paper needs to address the question directly with coherent arguments and evidence to support your main research questions or thesis. The paper should be no more than 10 pages double spaced with 12 font size and one-inch margins. The due date of the essay is May 2. Students should submit a hard copy of the essay to the instructor by the end of the class on the due date. I encourage you to discuss the topic with me before you begin to write the paper.

Participation and Presentation: To encourage discussion, I will assign students to present reading materials and ask questions of the class. Each student will have at least one chance to present topics that they choose for themselves from the reading list. The content of the presentation shall include a short summary of the reading materials, comments on the research questions, and talking points of the topic. The format of the presentations is informal. We will organize the presentation schedule as the class progresses.

Students should turn off their cell phones before class, and should refrain from surfing the internet or responding to email or IM during class.

Grading standard: Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scoring scheme.

A range: 90-100%

B range: 80-89%

C range: 70-79%

D range: 60-69%

F range: below 60%

Note: If an emergency arises during the quarter that makes fulfillment of class requirements difficult, please discuss the situation with me as early as possible, so we can discuss how to resolve the problem and maintain your good standing. Also if you need special assistance, you need to inform me on the first day of class.

Academic honesty: Students should follow the University regulations regarding academic integrity which are laid out in the *Student Handbook*. Students are strongly advised to read

and familiarize themselves with these regulations. If students violate standards of academic honesty -i.e., by cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or academic interference- they will get a failing grade for the class and may face expulsion from the University.

Required Texts:

1. Keyssar, Alexander. 2000. *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*. New York: Basic Books.
2. Niemi, Richard G. and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2001. *Controversies in Voting Behavior*. 4th edition. Washington DC: CQ Press.
3. Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A. Cloward. 2000. *Why Americans Still Don't Vote and Why Politicians Want it That Way*. Boston: Beacon Press.
4. Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rhode. 2007. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 elections*. CQ Press.

Recommended Texts:¹

1. Martin Wattenberg. 2002. *Where have all the voters gone?* Harvard University Press.
2. Steven J. Rosenstone and Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. MacMillan.
3. Jacobson, Gary. 2004. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. 6th edition. New York: Pearson Longman.
4. Morton, Rebecca. 2006. *Analyzing Elections*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Reading schedule²

1. Political history of Voting Rights

Week 1 (Jan. 14/ Jan. 16 / Jan. 18): Organization

Reading assignment: Keyssar ch.1-2

¹It is not necessary to purchase these books. But if you want to further your study on this topic, these books will be very useful to serve that purpose.

²This schedule is subject to change according to the progress of the class. The reading lists are adapted from the syllabus of Professor Melanie J. Springer at Washington University at St. Louis. It is available at <http://polisci.wustl.edu/media/faculty/PS336.Syllabus.08.27.07.pdf>

Week 2 (Jan. 21 no class/ Jan. 23/ Jan. 25):
Reading assignment: Keyssar ch. 3-4

Week 3 (Jan. 28/ Jan.30/ Feb 1):
Reading assignment: Keyssar ch.5-8

2. Historical/Sociological analysis of Voting and Elections

Week 4 (Feb. 4/ Feb. 6 / Feb 8):
Reading assignment: Piven ch.1-4

Week 5 (Feb. 11 / Feb. 13/ Feb. 15):
Reading assignment : Piven ch.5-8

Week 6 (Feb. 18 / Feb. 20/ Feb. 22):
Reading assignment: Piven ch.9-11

Week 7 (Feb. 25/ Feb. 27/ Feb 29): Piven ch. 12, Midterm review, Mid-term

3. Analysis of Contemporary Elections and Voting Behavior

Week 8 (Mar. 3/ Mar. 5/ Mar. 7): Political participation
Reading assignment: Niemi ch.1-5

Week 9 (Mar. 10/ Mar. 12 / Mar. 14): Polling and Public Opinion
Reading assignment: Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public*. 6th ed. Ch.1 ; Niemi Ch. 9.

Week 10 (Mar. 17/ Mar. 19 / Mar. 21): Information and voting
Reading assignment: Niemi ch. 6-8 ; Arthur Lupia. 1994. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review*, (88):63-76.

Week 11 (Mar. 31/ Apr. 2/ Apr. 4): Vote determinants
Reading assignment: Niemi ch. 10-13

Week 12 (Apr. 7/ Apr. 9 / Apr. 11): Campaigning and Party Identification
Reading assignment: Alan Gerber and Donald Green. 2000. "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." *APSR*. 653-663. Abramson et. al., ch. 8 and Niemi ch. 17-19

Week 13 (Apr. 14/ Apr. 16 / Apr. 18): Presidential elections

Reading assignment: Abramson et. al., ch. 1-3, 6-7

Week 14 (Apr. 21/ Apr. 23/ Apr. 25): Congressional elections
Reading assignment: Abramson et. al., ch.9-11 Niemi ch.14-15

Week 15 (Apr. 28/ Apr. 30/ May 2): Conclusion/ final review
Reading assignment: Abramson et. al., ch.12 Keyssar ch. conclusion

May 7 : Final exam