

## **Voting Behavior and Elections**

Fall, 2013 (POLS 227)

*(This syllabus is current as of August 27, 2013, but is subject to change.)*

Instructor: Dr. Noah Kaplan

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am – 10:45 pm, BSB 1115.

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:45 am – Noon, and by appointment.

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### Introduction

Every two years, large numbers of people in the United States perform one of the central tasks of citizenship in this country: voting. Many people assume that this activity certifies the democratic character of public life in the U.S. According to common wisdom, that is, the fact that some public offices are filled through open and competitive elections means that U.S. citizens effectively control their government – perhaps even that they govern themselves.

This course critically examines these common perceptions by posing a number of questions including:

- What are the purposes of elections in a democracy? How well do they enable the popular control of government? What other important values might they fulfill?
- Why do individuals vote (and abstain from voting) in the ways that they do? Are voters driven by their views on specific policy issues, or do they make choices based on other factors such as cultural affiliations or party loyalties?
- How are elections for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate different from presidential elections? Why do incumbents usually win reelection to Congress?

### Readings and Assignments

The weekly readings must be read **before** the first class for which they are assigned. Readings for each week are specified in the attached syllabus. The required texts are at the UIC bookstore. The required books for this course are:

Required Texts:

- 1) Paul Abramson *et al.* (AAR), *Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections*
- 2) Paul Herrnson, *Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition

Please note: additional articles and book chapters will be added to the required readings later in the semester. All such articles and chapters will be available online at least one week in advance via the course's Blackboard page.

## Newspapers

I expect you to read regularly at least one of the below newspapers throughout the course. Which paper you choose is up to you. I list five major newspapers to choose from and they are all freely accessible on the web or via Lexis-Nexis. Specifically:

- The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- The Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- The Wall Street Journal <http://online.wsj.com/home-page>
- The San Jose Mercury News <http://www.mercurynews.com/>
- The Guardian (UK) <http://www.guardiannews.com/>

Starting September 6<sup>th</sup>, you must bring in an article from one of these five papers **every** Thursday (except exam weeks 1, 6, 10 & 15). The article should be related to the topic of the week (to the extent possible). You must have your name and the date on the article and hand it in at the end of class. I will often initiate discussion by asking a student to read her/his article aloud to the class and then ask questions related to the article. Of the 10 weeks you are expected to submit an article, you can miss one without penalty.

## Class Requirements and Grading

- 1) Attendance, Participation and Weekly Newspaper Article – 20% of grade.  
The weekly readings must be read before the first class for which they are assigned. Readings for each week are specified in the attached syllabus. You should always come prepared to discuss the assigned material. I will call on individuals to respond to specific questions from time to time. I have kept the readings relatively manageable – approximately 80 pages a week, on average. I have done this to facilitate your ability to stay current with the readings, as well as to encourage close scrutiny of the texts.

Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class period. If you miss more than three classes, your course grade will be reduced by a full grade. If you miss more than five classes, your course grade will be reduced by two full grades. If do not miss more than three classes but do not participate in class discussions, you will receive a “B+” for this part of your grade. The more you participate in class discussion, the more I will "bump up" your grade for this part of the course (up to a maximum of “A+”).

- 2) Paper – 20% of grade (Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>)  
A 5 page essay (double spaced, 12-point font). You will be asked to respond to one of two questions, which I will provide you a week before the essay is due. This is a think piece, and does not require any reading beyond that specified for the course. The paper is due in class on Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>. For each day an assignment is late, including weekends, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment’s total point value from your score. You must submit a hard copy of the paper to me in class on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October. You must also submit a copy of the papers online on Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> via the course’s blackboard safeassign option before class begins.
- 3) Exam I – 30% of grade (Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>).

This will be an in-class midterm consisting of a few identifiers and a short essay. You will have the option of writing the essay based upon one of two questions. I will provide study questions the week before the exam.

4) Exam II – 30% of grade (Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>).

This will be an in-class final exam consisting of a few identifiers and a short essay. You will have the option of writing the essay based upon one of two questions. I will provide study questions the week before the exam.

**Prerequisites:** This course presupposes a basic knowledge of the American political system, as demonstrated by the completion of “Introduction to American Government and Politics” with a minimum grade of C (i.e., POLS 101 is a prerequisite).

**Make-Up Exams:** I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. In *all* instances, I will require documentation. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and you will arrange with me to take the exam *before* you leave town.

**Academic Etiquette:** Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room. Turn off all cell phones before class begins. Turn off all laptop computers before class begins.

When we are in class, you may not use a laptop computer, tablet, cell phone or PDA. If you believe you have a valid reason for using a laptop for note-taking purposes, please see me and we can discuss your situation. These courtesies will increase your engagement and improve the quality of everyone’s learning experience.

**Cheating and Plagiarism:** I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in **failing** the course and other disciplinary action. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible. Any violation may result in expulsion from the University. All students are expected to observe the University of Illinois at Chicago’s rules against cheating and plagiarism. See the section on “Academic Integrity/Academic Dishonesty” in the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Undergraduate Student Academic Policy Guide 2009-2011 (<http://www.uic.edu/depts/oaa/SMAAPP/guide.pdf>) for a full statement regarding UIC’s rules against cheating and plagiarism. The relevant regulations and procedures can be found at <http://www.uic.edu/depts/dos/docs/StudentDisciplinaryPolicy0809withpagenumbersandcov.pdf>. The department of political science provides a full definition of plagiarism and guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism at: <http://www.uic.edu/depts/pols/Plagiarism1.pdf>. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible.

**ADA Statement:** The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please see <http://www.uic.edu/index.html/disability.shtml> and then follow-up with me as appropriate.

### Schedule

Week 1: Introduction/Overview (August 27 & 29)

- No class on Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>!

Week 2: Recent General Election Campaigns and Election Results (Sept. 3 & 5)

- AAR, Chapters 2 & 3  
Recommended:
  - AAR, Chapter 1. Gives you background on presidential primary process.

Week 3: The Basic Logic of Voting & Economic Voting (Sept. 10 & 12)

- Downs, Chapters 1-3 (you can skim Chapter 2).
- AAR, Chapters 7.

Week 4: Vote Choice: Issues, Ideology and the Spatial Model (Sept. 17 & 19)

- Downs, Chapters 5, 7 & 8.
- AAR, Chapter 6.

Week 5: Vote Choice: The Roots of Partisanship (Sept. 24 & 26)

- AAR, Chapters 5 & 8.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. 2006. "Exploring the Bases of Partisanship in the American Electorate: Social Identity vs. Ideology." *Political Research Quarterly* 59(2): 175-187.
- Bafumi, Joseph and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2009. "A New Partisan Voter." *Journal of Politics* 71(1): 1-24.

Recommended:

- Bartels, Larry M. 2000. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(1) 35-50.

Week 6: Vote Choice: Partisanship and Information (Oct. 1 & 3)

**PAPER DUE on Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

- Downs, Chapters 11-13.
- Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 1997. "Voting Correctly." *The American Political Science Review*, 91(3): 585-598.

Recommended:

- Bartels, Larry M. 2002. "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions." *Political Behavior*, 24(2): 117-150.

Week 7: Turnout (Oct. 8 & 10)

- AAR, Chapter 4.
- McDonald, Michael and Samuel Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter" *The American Political Science Review* 95(4): 963-974.
- [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm)
- Highton, Benjamin and Raymond Wolfinger. 2001. "The Political Implications of Higher Turnout" *British Journal of Political Science* 30(3): 483-506.

Recommended:

- "2012 Election Turnout Dips Below 2008 and 2004 Levels" by the Bipartisan Policy Center. See the following URL:  
<http://bipartisanpolicy.org/sites/default/files/2012%20Voter%20Turnout%20Full%20Report.pdf>

Week 8: Turnout Continued (Oct. 15 & 17)

- Downs, Chapter 14.
- Smets, Kaat and Carolien van Ham. "The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout." *Electoral Studies* 32: 344-359.

Recommended:

- Geys, Benny. 2006. "Explaining voter turnout: A review of aggregate-level research." *Electoral Studies* 25: 637-663.
- Michelson, Melissa and David Nickerson. 2011. "Voter Mobilization." In *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* edited by James Druckman et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 9: Congressional Elections I (Oct. 22 & 24)

- AAR, Chapter 9.
- Herrnson, Chapters 1-3.

Week 10: Review and Exam I (Oct. 29 & 31)

Make-up & Exam I Review on the 29<sup>th</sup>.  
**EXAM I on the Nov. 31<sup>st</sup>.**

Week 11: Congressional Elections II (Nov. 5 & 7)

- AAR, Chapter 10.
- Herrnson, Chapters 4-6.

Week 12: Congressional Elections III (Nov. 12 & 14)

- Herrnson, Chapters 7-9.

Week 13: Turnout Again (Nov. 19 & 22)

- Campbell, Angus 1960. "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24(3): 397-418.
- Wolfinger, Raymond, Steven Rosenstone and Richard McIntosh. 1981. "Presidential and Congressional Voters Compared." *American Politics Quarterly* 9:245-255.
- Citrin, Jack; Eric Schickler; John Sides. 2003. "What If Everyone Voted? Simulating the Impact of Increased Turnout in Senate Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(1): 75-90.

Week 14: The 2010 Congressional Election and The Future (Nov. 26 & 28)

**NOTE: Thanksgiving is on the 28<sup>th</sup> – No class!**

- AAR, Chapters 11 & 12.
- Herrnson, Chapters 10 & 11.

Week 15: Review and Exam II (Dec. 3 & 5)

Exam II Review on the Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Exam II on Dec 5<sup>th</sup>.