

The American Electoral System

PO 516*

Professor Andrew Reeves

Noon to 3pm; Wednesdays

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3PM to 4:30PM; Thursdays 1PM to 2:30PM or by appointment.

Seminar Location: PLS 312B

Course Home Page: http://courseinfo.bu.edu/courses/08fallcaspo516_a1/

Introduction

This seminar is an indepth examination of the American electoral system. We will examine why citizens vote and how they decide whether or not to participate in politics. We will also examine candidates and how they campaign and how electoral concerns come to shade their behaviors as politicians.

Requirements

Participation. This is a reading and writing intensive seminar, so students are required to do the reading and come prepared to the seminar ready to discuss. Attendance will be taken at each meeting of the seminar. If a student cannot attend the seminar, he or she should contact me. More than one absence may adversely affect the student's grade.

Short Paper. For one week of the semester, the student is responsible for writing a 4 to 5 page paper which analyzes the readings assigned for the week. This paper should include a brief summary of the readings and focus on analysis. This analysis could include weaknesses of the argument; methodological problems with how concepts are measured; or, ideas to further expand the research, among other critiques. It is not necessary to critique the statistical methodology of an article, although one may do so if he or she feels comfortable with such concepts. **The paper is due by 5PM on the Tuesday before class.**

*Last updated Monday 3rd November, 2008; 16:14.

Two Paragraph Summary. Students must turn in a two paragraph description of their final paper on **October 22**.

Final Paper. Students are required to turn in a 15 to 20 page seminar style paper on a topic having to do with the American electoral system. This paper may also be a research proposal. Students will be provided with suggested topics and students may also pursue their own topic, pending the approval of the instructor.

Late Work. Late work is not accepted except under extraordinary and well documented circumstances.

Grading

Class Participation 35%

Short Paper 25%

Final Paper 40%

Books Required for Purchase

Bartels, L. M. (2008). *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. ISBN 978-0691136639.

Gelman, A. (2008). *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. ISBN 978-0691139272.

Holbrook, T. M. (1996). *Do Campaigns Matter?* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks. ISBN 978-0803973459.

Rosenstone, S. and Hansen, J. M. (2002). *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Longman. ISBN 978-0321121868.

Wolfinger, R. and Rosenstone, S. (1980). *Who Votes?* Yale University Press, New Haven. ISBN 978-0300025521.

Zaller, J. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, New York. ISBN 978-0521407861.

Course Outlines

September 3: Organizational Meeting

September 10: Turnout

Wolfinger, R. and Rosenstone, S. (1980). *Who Votes?* Yale University Press, New Haven. ISBN 978-0300025521. **Chapters 1,2, and 3.**

Rosenstone, S. and Hansen, J. M. (2002). *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Longman. ISBN 978-0321121868. **Chapter 6 and 7.**

Citrin, J., Schickler, E., and Sides, J. (2003). What If Everyone Voted? Stimulating the Impact of Increased Turnout in Senate Elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1):75–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3186094>.

Powell, G. B. (1986). American Voting Turnout in Comparative Perspective. *American Political Science Review*, 80(1):17–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1957082>.

September 17: Voting

Niemi, R. and Weisberg, H. (1984). What Determines the Vote? in *Controversies in Voting Behavior*. CQ Press, Washington, DC.

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(3):825–850. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111797>.

Kinder, D. R. and Kiewiet, D. R. (1981). Sociotropic Politics: The American Case. *British Journal of Political Science*, 11(2):129–161. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/193580>.

Popkin, S. (1994). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. **Chapters 1 to 4.**

September 24: Political Information

Shenkman, R. (2008). Just How Stupid Are We?: Facing the Truth About the American Voter. **Chapters 1, 2, and 3.**

Lau, R. and Redlawsk D. (2004). Voting Correctly in *Controversies in Voting Behavior*. CQ Press, Washington, DC.

Zaller, J. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, New York. ISBN 978-0521407861. **Chapters 2, 3 and 6.**

October 1: Campaigns

Holbrook, T. M. (1996). *Do Campaigns Matter?* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks. ISBN 978-0803973459. **Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6.**

Gelman, A. and King, G. (1993). Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls So Variable When Votes Are So Predictable? *British Journal of Political Science*, 23(1):409–451.

Mellman, M. The Meaning of those Poll Responses. *The Hill*, Nov 14. <http://thehill.com/mark-mellman/the-meaning-of-those-poll-responses-2007-11-14.html>.

In addition to the reading, please watch the debate on Friday, September 29 and follow the news coverage of it.

October 8: The Media

Iyengar, S. and Kinder. D.R. (1989). *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. **Chapters 1, 3, 7, and 12.**

Patterson, T. E. (1993). *Out of Order*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. **Chapters 1 and 2.**

October 15: Public Opinion and Election Polling

Key, V.O. (1961). *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York. **Chapter 1.**

Blumer, H. (1948). Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling. *American Sociological Review*, 13(5):542–549.

Squire, P. (1988). Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 52(1):125–133.

Hopkins, D. (2008). No More Wilder Effect, Never a Whitman Effect: When and Why Polls Mislead about Black and Female Candidates. manuscript.

Recommended:

Scheuren, F. (2004) *What is a Survey*. The Survey Research Methods Section of the American Statistical Association. **Chapter 1.**

October 22: Polarization

Gelman, A. (2008). *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. ISBN 978-0691139272. **Chapters 1 to 6 and 10.**

Brooks, D. (2001). One Nation, Slightly Divisible. *Atlantice Monthly*, pages 53–65.

October 29: Congressional Elections

Jacobson, G. C. (2004). *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, sixth edition. Pearson Longman, New York. **Chapters 2, 4, 5.**

November 5: Campaign Professionals

In class: *The War Room*.

Morris, D. (1999). *Behind the Oval Office: Getting Reelected Against All Odds.*, Renaissance Books, Los Angeles. **Chapter 8 and 14.**

Campbell, A. (2007). *The Blair Years: Extracts from the Alastair Campbell Diaries*, Hutchinson, London. **Introduction, and pages 167 to 187.**

Stephanopoulos, G. (1999). *All Too Human: A Political Education*, Little Brown and Company, Boston. **Chapter 3.**

November 12: 2008 Election

Readings TBA.

November 19: Money as Influence in Politics

Billitteri, T. (2008). Campaign Finance Reform. *CQ Researcher*, 18.

Schmidt, S., Grimaldia, J.V., Smith, R.J. Investigating Abramoff – Special Report. *Washington Post*, Feb 22 2004 – March 29 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/linkset/2005/06/22/LI2005062200936.html>

Hall, R. L. and Wayman, F. W. (1990). Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees. *American Political Science Review*, 84(3):797–820.

Ansolabehere, S., de Figueiredo, J. M., and Snyder, Jr., J. M. (2003). Why Is There So Little Money in US Politics? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17(1):105–130.

November 26: No Class

December 3: Elections and the Economy

Bartels, L. M. (2008). *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. ISBN 978-0691136639.

December 10: Class Presentations