Political Science 4212
Elections

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Course Description:
This course examines how politicians and policies are selected by citizens in democracies. The literatures exploring voter behavior and the rules and procedures that govern elections are perhaps the most theoretically and empirically sophisticated body of knowledge in the scientific study of politics. We will explore how differences in these institutional rules across a variety of democracies shape the types of choices voters make, the coalitions that legislators form, whose interests are represented, the career paths of politicians, and the policies that governments pursues. We will further investigate the dynamics of campaigns, campaign finance, and the politics underlying changes to electoral systems. The course, while having no formal prerequisites, will cover technical material. Statistical and game theoretic methods will be introduced and used throughout. A familiarity with high school level math is assumed.

Course Requirements:
Reading/Participation (20%): Articles or book chapters are assigned for each class meeting. You should do the readings prior to the class for which they are assigned and participate actively in class. All of the readings are available either from the universities electronic reserve, online at JSTOR, or website links are provided on the syllabus.

Problem Sets (10% each): Three problem sets will be assigned during the course. They will be due in class one week after they are assigned.

Midterm Exam (20%): There will be one midterm.

Final Exam (30%): The final will be comprehensive, covering the entire course, though focusing more heavily on the second half.

Course Materials
Most of the readings are available online, either from ER es or JSTOR. Those available on JSTOR are marked as such. Any readings not marked as available on JSTOR are either on ER es or in one of the following three books, available for purchase in the book store:


Course Schedule:

January 20 – Introduction

**Philosophical Issues**

January 22 – What is the role of voting in democracies?

January 27 – Fair Representation
- Shepsle, Kenneth and Mark Bonchek. *Analyzing Politics.* Chapter 7. ERES

**Voter Behavior**

January 29 – Party identification
- Nie, Norman, Sidney Verba, and John Petrocik. “The Decline of Partisanship” In *Classics of Voting Behavior.* ERES
- Fiorina, Morris. “Explorations of a political theory of party identification” in *Classics of Voting Behavior.* ERES.

February 3 – Sophistication in the electorate

February 5 – Another view of sophistication


February 12 – Strategic Voting


**Participation**

February 15 – Rational Turnout and Collective Action

➢ Problem Set 1 distributed


February 17 – Activism and Vanishing Voters


• Green, Donald and Alan Gerber. “Getting Out the Youth Vote: Results from Randomized Field Experiments.” ERES.

**Polling**

February 19 – Understanding polls

➢ Problem Set 1 due


February 24 – Guest Lecture: Jeff Smith, Ph.D. Candidate, Washington University and Candidate for Democratic Party Congressional Nomination, Missouri 3rd District.
February 26 – Polls and information (in class experiment)
  • No reading

**Incumbents**

March 2 – Sources of the incumbency advantage


March 4 – Measuring the incumbency advantage


  • Zaller, John. 1998. “Politicians as Prize Fighters: Electoral Selection and Incumbency Advantage.” [ERES](https://doi.org/10.1093/eres/erj061)

**Campaign Finance**

March 16 – Electoral Rules and Corruption


March 18 – Measuring the effect of campaign spending
  • Jacobson, chapter 4.


March 22 – Campaign finance reform

March 24 – MIDTERM EXAM

**The media**

March 30 – Campaigns and the media

- Problem Set 2 distributed


**Rational electioneering**

April 1 – The median voter theorem

- Shepsle, Kenneth and Mark Bonchek. *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 5. [ERES](http://www.eres.org)

April 6 – Non-convergence and evidence

- Problem Set 2 due


April 8 – Elections and the economy

- Readings to be determined.

**Comparative Electoral Systems**

April 13 – Types of electoral systems

- Cox, Chapter 3.

*April 15 – Midwest Political Science Association Meetings, no class.*

April 20 – Duverger’s law

- Problem Set 3 distributed
• Cox, chapter 2


April 22 – Electoral reform


April 27 – Election timing
➢ Problem Set 3 due


April 29 – Wrap-up