

PSC215
Gavett 301, 12:30-1:45 T-Th
Professor L. Powell lynda.powell@rochester.edu

Fall 2011

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 frequent short assignments, a midterm and a final. Class attendance is expected, and grades will reflect participation.

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 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*, 11th ed CQ
Other readings will be available electronically.

Assignments:

All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Assignments will count toward the class participation grade. You should do **four** of the assignments for the semester and skip the rest. Do one in September, one in October, one in November and the other whenever you choose. Homework assignments are due in class at the beginning of class. You should turn in one copy and keep a copy for yourself for class discussion. To get credit you need to turn in the assignment on time and, **if called upon**, discuss the assignment in class. Because there is flexibility built into the system, late work will not be accepted. In response to current events, some short readings will be added to the syllabus and some changes may occur in the schedule. If you should miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what the assignment and/or readings are for the next class period.

Students who are registered for the writing section of the course must write a term paper of 10-15 pages (about 3500 words). Students who are doing the writing requirement should only do **two** homework assignments. Term paper assignment: Choose a House district in 2010, 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? (If you are in the writing section, you may not do the similar class assignment). Papers are due the last day of class, December 13. A 3 page draft is due 4 weeks earlier in class, November 15. Also the class participation and assignment section will count 20% for W students.

Grading:

Class Participation and Assignments	15%
Midterm Exam October 27	40%
Final December 19 7:15 PM	45%

Introduction.

Partisanship—Voters and Electorates. Sep 6 (T) & Sep 8 (Th)

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.

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?

For the second class, do voters know enough?

Readings should be completed for the first day of a section and Assignments should always be completed and turned in on the first day of a section also.

Assignment: In addition to the above readings, use the National Journal online Almanac of American Politics to print out information on one House member, including information on their district and on their key votes. (You may find the Almanac by starting at Rush Rhees library’s home page; proceed to databases; choose National Journal and within the Almanac, choose elected officials.) Be prepared to discuss **in class** the district’s partisanship, any notable constituency features of demographics, economy, and issue preferences. How well does the member’s voting behavior, partisanship, committee assignments and priorities fit the district? When was the member first elected? Is he or she in a ‘safe’ district?

House Districts, Apportionment and Redistricting. Sep 13 (T).

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.

Assignment: In addition to the above readings, look at the redistricting process for the U. S. House in one state. (Be sure to choose a state that elects more than one representative to Congress.) Bring a one-page summary to class. Your discussion should include how the redistricting decision is made in the state, the partisanship of the key players, key local issues, and any relevant current information. Sources: you may find the following internet sites useful as the basis for your research: Many states have their own internet sites, and are listed on www.ncsl.org. (Use issue areas, redistricting and links) Also try newspapers in your state using the library electronic newspaper resources such as Lexis Nexis. The timing may not be right for Cook's Report on the 2010 Redistricting, which should be part of the National Journal online site. You may also be able to reach Cook's as follows from on campus: <http://www.bepress.com/rhodescook/>. Be prepared to explain how redistricting works in the state and answer questions related to the topics you had to discuss. If you can't find out enough information for the first state you picked, choose another.

House and Senate Primary Elections. Sep 15 (Th) and Sep 20 (T).

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 primary, such as, "The 60th Democrat" by Michael Sokolove, NYT Magazine, August 22, 2010.

Assignment: Choose a House district in 2010, 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. How did these factors along with the primary rules influence the results of the primary elections and the general election? This assignment should be no more than 2 pages in length. If you are taking this class as a W writing course, you may not do this assignment.

Presidential Primary Elections. Sep 22 (Th) and Sep 27 (T).

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.

Assignment For the 2008 presidential election describe the rules used in one state to choose delegates to a national convention and indicate the 2008 result. Discuss how the rules may have affected the result.

Money in Elections. Sep 29 (Th) Oct 4 (T).

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.

Assignment Choose a member of the House or Senate running for reelection in 2010. Locate information that indicates how much money this individual raised and spent thus far in the 2010 election. If possible find out how much any opponents raised and spent. Also identify what proportion of the money to the winner was from individuals, parties and major categories of PACs. Find what percent of the money was raised in state versus out of state, and what major types of groups provided contributions (eg labor, pharmaceuticals, pro-life etc). Relate the sources of their contributions to their committee assignments and perhaps issue positions. Try online sources: www.opensecrets.org, and www.fec.gov. You should not need to write much. Print off no more than 10 pages of material and write no more than a page on the relationship between their committee assignments, ideology, issue priorities and sources of contributions. The web sites can be slow, so try at non-peak times. On the FEC website you can search for information on all candidates in a particular House or Senate race. Be sure that you choose the current election cycle. The FEC site gives good summary information on all candidates. For useful detail, the Center for Responsive Politics breaks down the contributions into useful categories.

Measuring Public Opinion—What Does Polling Reveal? Oct 6 (Th) & Oct 13 (T)
Erikson and Tedin, Chapter 2 in *American Public Opinion* 8th 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 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

Assignment Find several polls online taken about the same time that focus on a U.S. House or Senate races. Who was surveyed? (If likely voters were surveyed,

how were they defined?) How many individuals were surveyed? How was the vote question asked? Were there any questions preceding the vote question that might have biased the answers? Did the predictions of the polls vary, if so how? Hint: Try the National Journal in Databases through the library portal. Then go to Hotline and Tipsheet for any House and Senate race and click on the link for poll results. To get details on how the poll was done try googling the particular polling company they cite. Also try real clear politics or any of the excellent aggregator sites.

Legislative General Elections—The Incumbency Advantage in Elections. Oct 18 (T)
Oct 20 (Th)

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.

Assignment Find an incumbent member of the US. House or Senate who received less than 55% of the vote in the general election in 2010. How can you explain the closeness of this race or the defeat of the incumbent if he or she lost. Here you may write up no more than one page or print off one page from an electronic source.

Catch Up and Review for Hourly Exam: Oct 25.

First Hourly Exam: Oct 27.

The Electoral College. Nov 1 (T)

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

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

Assignment Read several short pieces on the Electoral College (pro and con). Here I would suggest that you search the net or ask a reference librarian for help using Lexus/Nexus etc. Many major journals of political commentary contained editorials. (See, for example, an editorial in *The New Republic*, November, 2000

or Kathryn Lopez, "Hillary is Wrong," in the National Review Online, November, 2000.) Write no more than one page (double-spaced) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the Electoral College. (Be sure you know how the Electoral College works first.)

General Elections—Presidential. Nov 3 (Th) and Nov 8 (T)

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

Assignment Find one article online that discusses the 2008 presidential general election outcome. Choose a quality source such as the Washington Post, NYT, CNN, Harris Interactive and so forth. Print off and turn in no more than 5 pages.

Initiatives and Referenda. Nov 10 (Th)

Streb, Rethinking, Ch 4

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

Counting and Casting Ballots. Nov 15 (T).

Streb, Rethinking Ch 5 and 6.

Assignment Find a discussion of the pros and cons of electronic voting, voting by mail or any other voting technology. Turn in no more than 5 pages.

Minor Parties and Independent Candidates. Nov 17 (Th).

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

Morton Ch 14.

Assignment Find information on or a discussion of the Nebraska legislature. Be prepared to join in a discussion of this nonpartisan legislature and how it differs from a partisan legislature. For example, Do candidates actually run on party labels? How do candidates get on the ballot? Do parties support candidates? Do parties play a role in the organization and operation of the legislature? Turn in no more than 5 pages printed from your sources or write up one page.

Mass Media/Internet in Elections. Nov 22 (T) and Nov 29 (T)

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

Assignment Find an internet site that is or has been involved in supporting candidates for office. Print off a page from the site to turn in. Try to find out, but not turn in: Who runs the site? What issues does it advocate? What candidates

does it support? How does it support them? Is it connected to either party or to an offline group?

Culture War & Ideological Polarization. Dec 1 (Th) and Dec 6 (T).

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.

Assignment 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 other religion or to none, men to women or any similar demographic. How do the poll results relate to the debate on polarization?

Representation. Dec 8 (Th)

Hetherington, Ch 7.

Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam. Dec 13 (T)