

PSC215
Gavett 312, 12:30-1:45 M-W
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Fall 2012

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

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 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.

NOTE: As new material appears, I will be updating these readings to better reflect the current campaign.

Writing Section:

Students who are registered for the writing section of the course must write a term paper of 10-15 pages (about 3500 words). Term paper assignment: Choose a **House** district in 2012, 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? Papers are due the last day of class,

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*

From Wayne: Party officials in IA and NH strongly objected to the changes in the Democratic caucus and primary schedule for 2008. Describe the arguments for and against a few small states, such as IA and NH being allowed to hold their nomination contests before the rest of the states. Have these states contributed to or detracted from a democratic presidential nomination process?

In what ways does the sequence of primaries matter?

In what ways were this year's primaries so different from the 2008 primaries? Why is this the case?

Money in Elections. Oct 3 (W) Oct 10 (W).

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.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

First class:

Why do we care about campaign contributions?

Does money matter? Does it affect who runs for office? Does money affect election outcomes? Does money shape public policy?

How should the concept of money as free speech be weighed against the potentially corrupting influence of money? Should it be limited or regulated?

Second class:

What did the Supreme Court decide in Citizens United?

Should contributions to candidates be disclosed publicly?

Who gives contributions to candidates? Why do they give? Do donors get anything in return?

Streb argues that we should not limit the amount of contributions given to candidates.

What is his argument? What might be counter arguments?

Measuring Public Opinion What Does Polling Reveal? Oct 15 (M) & Oct 17 (W)
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

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

Who uses polling?

If we are interested in elections, why should we care about polling?

Why do poll results vary so much? How is it possible for one firm to report one candidate is ahead 54% to 40% while another reports that they are tied?

How can you evaluate the quality of a poll that is reported?

Legislative General Elections The Incumbency Advantage in Elections. Oct 22 (M)
Oct 24 (W)

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.

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

First class:

The Electoral College. Oct 31 (

Find information about, think about and be prepared to discuss the following:

In what ways does ballot design matter?

What are the different voting machines? Why do the different methods of voting matter?

Are there issues to access we should think about?

Were there accusations in this election that the electoral laws advantaged or disadvantaged one party relative to another or one demographic group over another?

Minor Parties and Independent Candidates. Nov 19 (M).

Barry Burden “Minor parties and strategic voting in recent US presidential elections

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.

What is Abramowitz's argument?

What is Fiorina's counter argument?

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

Why should we care about polarization between the parties?

Why did polarization happen?

What can we do about it?

Representation. Dec 10 (M)

Hetherington, Ch 7.

What is the doctrine of responsible parties, eg as outlined by Hetherington?

Hetherington also discusses how our institutions of government affect party organizations. Explain his argument (or that of others).

How strong are our parties today?

What are some of the different meanings of political representation?

Why does representation matter?

Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for exam. Dec 12 (W)