

## Elections and Voting Behavior (PLS 341-01) Winter 2013

**Class Location:** Mackinac Hall BLL126

**Class Time:** 3:00pm - 4:15pm, Monday and Wednesday

**Professor:** Whitt Kilburn, Ph.D.

**Office:** AuSable Hall 1103

**Telephone:** (616) 331-8831

**Email:** kilburnw@mail.gvsu.edu

**In Person Office Hours:** Monday, Wednesday, 1-3pm, and by appointment

**Virtual Office Hours:** Whenever I am logged in to GVSU Gmail chat

**Course Website:** Blackboard, <http://mybb.gvsu.edu>

In this course we will focus our study of elections and voting behavior on some of the central organizing concepts and theories that have formed our discipline's study of the subject. We will study how voters form opinions, a vote choice, and the consequences of low levels of civics knowledge and participation for democratic governance. Along the way, we will examine the factors shaping voter behavior from early childhood socialization, core values and personality, neighborhood influence, and social group, among other factors. Hopefully, these insights will shape our understanding of a few key developments in contemporary American politics, such as the polarization and sorting across the 'red' and 'blue' Americas, geographic mobility and its effect on political behavior, perpetual claims about 'soccer' or 'security' moms etc. as swing voters, party issue ownership, changes in voter turnout, and the dynamics of American presidential election campaigns. There are two overarching, broad course goals. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Explain some of the general, major theories of American elections and voting behavior in political science.
2. Apply general theories to an interpretation of contemporary developments in American electoral politics.

The study of elections and public opinion is vast. We can't possibly cover it all in one semester. We will, however, focus our attention on contemporary works drawing upon major theories guiding the discipline over the past 50 years.

### Required Course Texts:

Abramowitz, A. I. 2010. *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ellis, C. and Stimson, J. 2012. *Ideology in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Erikson, R. E. and Wlezien, C. 2012. *The Timeline of Presidential Elections: How Campaigns Do (and Do Not) Matter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fiorina, M. 2009. *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Igo, S. E. 2008. *The Averaged American*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Various supplementary book chapters will be available through Blackboard. Other journal articles are available from the library.

## Schedule and Activities

**Mondays and Wednesdays** The class will be conducted seminar style, for the most part, with relatively little lecturing on my part. Each day we will discuss the theories and results from the various readings assigned for the day. *The reading assignments are always required and never optional; the course is a senior level class, so you should expect a demanding reading load.* You must come to class prepared to share your thoughts about the reading assignments. Credit will be awarded during class for successful contributions to class discussions.

**Discussion Questions and Summaries** For each class day's reading assignment, at a minimum, you should 1) be prepared to share with the class one or two discussion questions for which you would like the class to respond, and 2) write a short two to three paragraph summary, in which you identify interesting theories, results, or themes from the reading assignments. While not required, you should type your question(s) at the end of these summaries. I will collect these questions and reaction pieces for course credit, graded on a High Pass (100%), Pass (85%) or Fail (50%) basis. If you do not turn one in, you receive a 0%. You must write these pieces in complete sentences; 'bullet points' are not acceptable. These written assignments are due when collected during class and must be submitted in typed hard copy. Responses to these questions may be turned in late, after class, no later than the Friday of the assigned week. So please plan ahead and prepare for printer malfunctions.

On most class days I will select a few of you to write your discussion question up on the board at the beginning of class. While we will try to work in every class member's topics for discussion, beyond the subjects that I think are the most important to discuss we will address the questions raised by these five students.

On some class days, credit will be awarded for participation in activities that are organized and conducted entirely during class.

**Other Homework Assignments** From time to time, I'll assign you news media articles to read. Everyone will be expected to contribute news media articles, relating to the class, to the Discussion Board on Blackboard.

**Research Papers** You will write a quantitative paper applying the skills you acquired and refined in STA 215 and PLS 300. I will expect you to write an approximately 10-15 page research paper exploring and synthesizing some aspect of voting and electoral behavior that you would like to study further. You will work out the subject during a meeting with me and an outline of the project will be due before Spring Break. You'll turn in the research paper during the last week of class.

**Presentation** You will be responsible for presenting your research paper to the class during the final examination period at the end of the semester.

**Exams** There will be a mid-semester and a final examination. The format will be chosen at my discretion. The questions will draw upon the course readings and discussions, emphasizing the reading discussion questions brought up during class.

**Participation** You will be assigned a participation grade, reflecting whether you contributed to class discussion, or actively avoided your responsibilities to the class.

## General Policies and Procedures

I will hold you accountable to high standards. Beyond that, there are a few key things you should know about my expectations of you:

1. Most important of all, while I do not take attendance, I do keep track of tardiness and participation. I expect you to arrive to class on time and actively participate throughout the entire class. The class suffers when any student routinely skips class or is apathetic about assignments. If you are in class, I expect you to *be in class*. Avoid incessantly checking your phone or watching cat videos on your laptop.
2. I do not accept late assignments without penalty. There are no make-ups for any of the in-class activities. If you want to turn in these assignments, attend class.
3. Assignments collected in class should be submitted via hard copy. I do not accept assignments emailed to me, so plan ahead for printer malfunctions, or better yet, use your own handwriting.
4. The essay outline and final version must be turned in via Blackboard, submitted in Course Documents, by the deadline.
5. You should *always* bring a copy of the assigned reading with you to class. Print out copies of the articles from JSTOR and other online sources and bring those too. Just like for any other upper-division course in the PLS department, you should always have the reading with you.
6. If you believe you will have trouble with the course, I encourage you to call an academic counselor at the Advising Resources and Special Programs Unit, 331-3588.

## Grades

Reading Questions 30%

Research Paper 30%

Research Presentation 10%

Exams (averaged) 25%

Participation 5%

Unless standardized scores are necessary, the course grading scale will be:

A 93-100	A- 90-92
B+ 87-89	B 84-86
B- 80-83	C+ 76-79
C 72-75	C- 69-72
D+ 65-68	D 60-64
F <60	

## HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

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1. Studiously avoid last-minute preparation and complete all assignments.
  2. Attend every class session.
  3. Make peace with the fact that you do have a heavy reading load for the course. Save time for it.
  4. Participate regularly in class discussions, demonstrating your mastery of the day's reading assignments.
  5. Talk to me during office hours about any concerns or to clarify expectations.
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## Tentative Schedule

Please note the schedule really is tentative. I may make modifications to the readings and schedule depending on course progress. The schedule will be divided up into modules covering different themes. If the assigned readings are *not* from a journal or one of the books available for the course at the bookstore, a PDF copy will be posted on Blackboard Course Documents.

### 1 Foundations – Belief Systems of American Voters

**Monday 1/7** : Course orientation — no reading assignment

**Wednesday 1/9** : Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In David E. Apter, ed. *Ideology and Its Discontents*. New York: Free Press. (BLACKBOARD)  
*Few studies have had as great an influence on the study of electoral behavior than this chapter by Converse.*

Optional: For a review of electoral research over the past few decades, much of it following in Converse' footsteps, see "The Study of Electoral Behavior". In Jan E. Leighley, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior* <http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/electoralbehavior.pdf>

Take the "World's Shortest Political Quiz", sponsored by the Libertarians: <http://www.theadvocates.org/quizp/>, and be prepared to discuss how we interpret the results in light of the Converse reading assignments. –In short, do little quizzes like this tell us anything meaningful?

### 2 Contours of American Ideology

**Monday 1/14** : Ellis and Stimson, *Ideology in America* Chapters 1-3

**Wednesday 1/16** : Ellis and Stimson, *Ideology in America* , Chapters 4-5

### 3 Contours of American Ideology, ctd.

**Monday 1/21** : No Class, MLK Holiday

**Wednesday 1/23** : Ellis and Stimson, *Ideology in America* , Chapters 6-8

## 4 Social Class and Economic Voting

**Monday 1/28** : Excerpt from Gelman, Andrew. 2009. *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do (Expanded Edition)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Excerpt from Hillygus, D. Sunshine, and Todd G. Shields. *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

**Wednesday 1/30** : Excerpt from Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## 5 Voter Coalitions

**Monday, 2/4** : Excerpts from Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the party system: Alignment and realignment of political parties in the United States*. Brookings Institution Press, 1983.

Excerpt from Lewis-Beck, Michael S., et al. 2008. *The American voter revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

**Wednesday, 2/6** : Excerpt from Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. *Issue evolution: Race and the transformation of American politics*. Princeton University Press, 1990.

Excerpt from Mayhew, David R. *Electoral realignments: a critique of an American genre*. Yale University Press, 2004.

Brady, H. 2002. "Trust the people: political party coalitions and the 2000 election" In J. Rakove, eds. New York: Basic Books.

## 6 Mass Polarization: Myth or Reality?

**Monday, 2/11** : Chapters 1-3 of Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*

**Wednesday, 2/13** : Chapters 4-5 of Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*

## 7 Polarization and Representation

**Monday 2/18** : Chapters 6-8 of Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*

**Wednesday 2/20** : *Midsemester Examination in class*.

## 8 Geographical Sorting and the Effect of Geography on Voter Behavior

**Monday 2/25** : Excerpt from Bishop, Bill. 2009. *The Big Sort*. New York: Mariner Books. Posted on Blackboard.

Abrams, Samuel J., and Morris P. Fiorina. "The Big Sort That Wasn't: A Skeptical Reexamination." *PS Political Science and Politics* 45.2 (2012): 203.

**Wednesday 2/27** : Excerpt from Gimpel, J. G. 2004. *Patchwork Nation: Sectionalism and Political Change in American Politics* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Excerpt from Fenton, John. H. 1966. *Midwest Politics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Johnston, R. J. 1982. "Places and Votes: The Role of Location in the Creation of Political Attitudes". *Urban Geography* 7(2): 103-117.

See this website: <http://www.patchworknation.com>

## Spring Break, March 3 through 10

## 9 Assessing Campaign Effects

**Monday 3/11** : Erikson and Wlezien, Chapters 1-3

Excerpt from Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*. New York: Crown.

**Wednesday 3/13** : Erikson and Wlezien, Chapters 4-5

## 10 From Campaign Effects to Voter Personality Predispositions

**Monday 3/18** : Erikson and Wlezien, Chapters 6-8

**Wednesday 3/20** : Excerpts from Hetherington, M. J. and J. D. Weiler. 2009. *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## 11 Heredity and Behavior Genetics in Elections and Voting Behavior

**Monday 3/25** : Carney, D., J. Jost, S. Gosling, and J. Potter. 2008. The Secret Lives of Liberals and Conservatives: Personality Profiles, Interaction Styles, and the Things They Leave Behind. *Political Psychology* 29(6): 807-840. (EJOURNAL)

Barker, D. and J. Tinnick. 2006. Competing Visions of Parental Roles and Ideological Constraint. *American Political Science Review* 100:29-63.

**Wednesday 3/27** : Alford, J., C. Funk, and J. Hibbing. 2005. Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted? *The American Political Science Review* 6:321-35.

## **12 Course Reflection: Contemporary American Politics and the Breakdown of Representation?**

**Monday 4/1**: Fiorina, *Disconnect*, Chapters 1-5

**Wednesday 4/3** : Fiorina, *Disconnect*, Chapters 6-8

## **13 Course Reflection: How Does Polling Affect Our View of the American Nation?**

**Monday 4/8** : Chapters 1-3 of Igo, *The Averaged American*

**Wednesday 4/10** : Chapters 4-6 of Igo, *The Averaged American*

## **14 Semester Completion: Project work day and final examination**

**Monday 4/15 — Wednesday 4/17** : No reading assigned. Final Examination on April 17.

### **Paper Presentation during Final Examination Period**

**When** *Please check the registrar's calendar to verify the time and date of the final examination time slot.*

**What** You will present your paper to class and turn it in via hard copy.