Description

This course takes place amid the heat of the 2016 presidential campaign. We will make sense of what is happening by taking a wider view of U.S. elections.

Elections are essential elements of a successful democracy. Americans in particular are asked to vote frequently and on a wide range of offices and issues. How well do people exercise these opportunities?

This course will examine the many factors that affect voter participation and how voters make decisions. Together we will explore theories dealing with party identification, group and geographic patterns, economic accountability, issue voting, and more. A nagging question will be present throughout all of these topics: are Americans capable of making “good” decisions? At the end of course you should have a firm understanding of theories of voting behavior and a means for answering this question.

The course material will include major theories of electoral behavior, but the approach will be mainly empirical. The readings are full of data. Be prepared to spend some time with graphs and tables, and to conduct some hands-on analysis. I hope you enjoy the material, ask probing questions, are surprised by some of the findings, and finish the semester with some new tools for understanding the electorate.

Requirements

Students are expected to do all of the assigned reading, attend lectures ready to learn, actively participate in section meetings, and to put in their best efforts in the assignments and exams. Please come to class on time and do not allow electronic devices to interfere with the learning experience.
Two core textbooks comprise most of the required readings:

*Change and Continuity in the 2012 and 2014 Elections* (Abramson, Aldrich, Gomez, and Rohde, CQ Press)
*Conventional Wisdom and American Politics*, 3rd ed. (Baumgartner and Francia, Rowman and Littlefield)

These texts will be supplemented with readings from other sources available on the course web site (Learn@UW). Students are expected to check e-mail and the web site frequently for news and course materials. I reserve the right to adjust the syllabus and readings as the semester progresses.

Office hours are for you. Please use them. Appointments for meetings outside of regular office hours are also possible.

**Grading**

The final grade will be based on the following four items:

- Midterm exam [Oct 27] (25%)
- Final exam [Dec 22] (40%)
- Forecasting project [due Oct 18] (25%)
- Section attendance and participation (5%)
- Lecture “spot checks” (5%)

More details about the exams and data project will be provided later in the semester. The exams will be taken in class and will involve a combination of shorter answers and brief essays. The data project assignment will be an exercise in quantitative analysis with a report on the findings. The project will be penalized 10 percentage points for each day it is late without instructor permission. The “spot checks” will be random in-class activities in which students reflect on the day’s material (and show that they are present in lecture).

The grading scale is as follows:

- A = 93-100%
- AB = 88-92.9%
- B = 83-87.9%
- BC = 78-82.9%
- C = 70-77.9%
- D = 60-69.9%
- F = 0-59.9%

Your success in this class is important to me. If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact the teaching team early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.
Academic misconduct is not tolerated. All academic work must be your own and cite others’ work appropriately. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

Please only use electronic devices in class for referencing course materials, taking notes, and occasionally tracking down online items that are necessary for our discussions. Everything else should be quieted and stowed away for later use.

Classes are formatted mostly as lectures, although your questions and feedback are warmly welcomed. I encourage you to be actively involved in both “lectures” and section meetings. Slides presented in class will be posted to the course web site at the end of each unit. They are not a substitute for attending lecture, taking notes, and reading assigned material.

**Tentative Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 6</td>
<td>Voter Competence in a Democracy</td>
<td>Lupia, “How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Conventional Wisdom</em> [chapters 8 &amp; 12]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 15</td>
<td>Voter Turnout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 20</td>
<td>Change and Continuity</td>
<td><em>Conventional Wisdom</em> [chapter 3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 22</td>
<td>Congressional Elections</td>
<td>Change and Continuity [chapters 9 &amp; 11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 27</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Conventional Wisdom</em> [chapter 11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>Patterns of Presidential Elections</td>
<td>Change and Continuity [chapters 2 &amp; 3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Conventional Wisdom</em> [chapters 4 &amp; 7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td>Presidential Nominations</td>
<td>Change and Continuity [chapter 1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sides and Vavreck, “Random, or Romney?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Forecasting project due Oct 18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 20</td>
<td>Election Laws and Administration</td>
<td>Stewart, “A Voter’s Eye View of the 2012 Election”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 25</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Conventional Wisdom</em> [chapter 5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 27</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nov 1  Demographic Groups and the Vote
Nov 3  Change and Continuity  [chapter 5]
Nov 8  Conventional Wisdom  [chapter 2]
Gelman et al., “Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What’s the Matter with Connecticut?”

Nov 10 Election Rundown!

Nov 15 Partisanship and Polarization
Nov 17 Change and Continuity  [chapter 8]
Nov 22 Shaw, “If Everyone Votes Their Party, Why Do Presidential Election Outcomes Vary So Much?”

Nov 29 Candidates and Issues
Dec 1  Change and Continuity  [chapter 6]
Dec 6  Conventional Wisdom  [chapter 9]
Petrocik, “Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study”

Dec 8 Swing Voters and Economic Accountability
Dec 13 Change and Continuity  [chapter 7]
Conventional Wisdom  [chapter 1]
Mayer, “The Disappearing – but Still Important – Swing Voter”

Dec 15 Conclusion
Change and Continuity  [chapter 13]

Dec 22 Final exam (10:05am-12:05pm)