This course analyzes American elections and voting behavior, with an emphasis on recent presidential elections. The primary thrust of this course is toward understanding the behavior of voters, which means explaining why people vote the way that they do. Understanding the behavior of voters allows us to interpret and understand election outcomes. In attempting to explain the behavior of voters and the outcomes of elections, we will be especially concerned with recent changes and the implications of these changes for the future of American politics.

Among the questions that we will discuss in this course are: Why do many Americans fail to vote? How does party affiliation influence voters? Do specific policy issues affect how voters cast their ballots? How much do economic conditions affect the outcomes of presidential and congressional elections? What impact do the personal characteristics of presidential candidates have on the way that people vote? What changes have taken place in American voting patterns over the past several decades? How and why do congressional elections differ from presidential elections. What factors are likely to influence the outcome of the 2012 presidential election?

Because this is a course in political science, we will be concerned with how elections and voting behavior can be studied. The collection and analysis of data to examine voting behavior will be discussed throughout the course, and the research papers will provide "hands-on" experience. Both papers will involve computer-based analysis of survey data. No prior experience with this computer application is necessary, but those who have already taken PSC 301 should find some familiar material in this course.

This course will be run in more of a seminar style than in a traditional lecture-discussion format. There will be a strong emphasis on class participation, which means active engagement in the class sessions. You will be expected to read the material for the class session and to be prepared to discuss it in class. Class participation will count for a sizable portion of the course grade.

Student Learning Objectives:

As a result of taking this course, students should be able to:
1. Explain the impact of the important factors that affect individual voting behavior.
2. Describe the relationship between voting behavior and social and demographic characteristics.
3. Identify the sources of change in voting patterns over time.
4. Analyze survey data in order to investigate individual voting behavior.

Books

The following two books are available at the bookstore in paperback editions:


(If you are purchasing used copies of the books, be sure that you are purchasing the correct editions.)
Library Reserves

There is a considerable amount of library reserve reading for this course. I think that this reading is important for many of the topics. While the course textbooks are very good, they do not cover many topics in sufficient depth, so supplementary reading is needed. Furthermore, I think that it desirable for students in upper-level political science courses to read some journal articles. If you dislike having substantial library reserve reading, this course probably is not for you.

Chapters from the following books are available as e-reserves (through Blackboard):

L. Bartels, Unequal Democracy, chpt. 3.
A. Campbell, et al., The American Voter, chpts. 5, 8.
M. Lewis-Beck, et al., The American Voter Revisited, chpts. 11-12.

The following journal articles are available as e-reserves (through Blackboard):


The following books are available at the library on closed reserve. Consult them if you need information on the 2008 presidential election:

L. Sabato (ed.), The Year of Obama.
Course Requirements

This course is designated as writing intensive. That not only means that there will be a great deal of writing in this course; it also means that you will receive feedback on your writing and that we will devote some class time to discussing writing in political science. More information on this aspect of the course is on another handout.

The grades in this course will be determined by:

1. Reading summaries, due throughout the course. There will be 20 summaries assigned, each worth up to 10 points. Your best 10 summaries will be counted. The summaries should be limited to one single-spaced typed page (approximately 500-600 words). Summaries must be submitted in person during the class period in which they are due. Details on the reading summaries are on another handout.

2. A paper that examines the relationship between partisan choice and social and demographic factors. This paper will involve a computer-based analysis of survey data from the 2008 presidential election. Details on this project will be distributed at the start of the semester. There will be a preliminary and final draft of this paper, but only the final draft will receive a grade.

3. A paper that analyzes the impact of political attitudes and evaluations on the presidential vote in 2008, based on an analysis of survey data from the 2008 election. Details on this paper will be distributed in early late February. There will be a preliminary and a final draft of this paper, and both drafts will be graded.

4. Class participation. Class participation will be based in part on attendance, since an empty chair cannot participate at all. However, simply attending class is insufficient to receive a good grade. You also should come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to discuss them. Asking good questions is an important part of class participation, so think of good questions to ask while you are doing the readings.

The course grade will be determined by a point system:

- Reading summaries (10 x 10 points each)  100 points
- Paper on social factors and voting        100 points
- Paper on attitudes and voting, first draft 100 points
- Paper on attitudes and voting, final draft 100 points
- Class participation                      100 points

Total = 500 points

One note about your written work. You should be familiar with the UNCG academic integrity policy and abide by its provisions in any work that you do. Among other things, this means that your written work should not contain plagiarized material. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me for clarification. While I expect that any work that you submit will be your own work, not that of someone else, I encourage you to study and work together. It is a good idea to discuss the readings, compare data analyses, and exchange ideas with others in the class. I think that you will benefit from the right kind of collaborative work.
Course Outline

As the following outline indicates, many of the topics are covered by readings from several sources. The class sessions will be especially important for integrating this diverse material, as well as for clearing up anything that is confusing in the readings. In order for the class sessions to be worthwhile, it is essential that you complete the readings prior to each scheduled class session.

The reading assignments are listed below. The tentative dates for each topic are listed, although these are subject to change, depending on how the course develops. The due date for each reading assignment will be announced in class.

Readings that are on library reserve are so indicated by a “[e-reserve]” following the listing. The books that are not on e-reserve are on closed reserve at the library. Books usually are referred to simply by the author’s last name; consult page 2 of this syllabus for the title (e.g., Campbell et al. refers to *The American Voter*). For journal articles on e-reserve, a more complete citation is provided.

The readings from the book by Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde focus on the 2004 election. If you have forgotten the details of that election, skim chapters 2 and 3 of that book to review the events and outcome for that election.

A. Turnout in national elections (Jan. 22-29)

- Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 1, 2
- Campbell, et al., chpt. 5 [e-reserve]
- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 4
- Powell, “American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective,” *APSR* (March 1986) [e-reserve]

B. Party identification (Feb. 1-5)

- Flanigan and Zingale, chpts. 3 (pp. 67-72) and 4
- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 8

C. Analyzing data from the 2008 election (Feb. 8-15)

Examine the material on the *Voting Behavior: The 2008 Election* SETUPS Web site (www.icpsr.umich.edu/SETUPS)

D. Social factors and the vote (Feb. 17-22)

- Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 5
- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 5
- Lewis-Beck, et al., chpts 11-12 [e-reserve]

E. Attitudinal basis of the vote (Feb. 24 - March 15)

- Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 8
- Miller and Shanks, chpt. 8 [e-reserve]
F. Issues, attitudes and the vote

1. The role of policy issues in elections (March 17-26)
   - Flanigan and Zigale, chpt. 6, chpt. 7 (pp. 173-186)
   - Campbell, et al., chpt. 8 [e-reserve]
   - Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 6
   - Hillygus and Shields, chpt. 2 [e-reserve]
   - Bartels, chpt. 3 [e-reserve]

2. Retrospective evaluations and voting behavior (March 29 - April 5)
   - Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 7

3. The influence of perceptions of candidate characteristics (April 7-12)
   - Miller and Shanks, chpt. 15 [e-reserve]
   - Prysby, “Perceptions of Candidate Character Traits and the Presidential Vote in 2004,” *PS* (January 2008) [e-reserve]

G. Aspects of electoral dynamics

1. Short-run versus long-term electoral change (April 14-19)
   - Flanigan and Zigale, chpt. 3 (pp. 72-87)
   - Sundquist, chpt. 1 [e-reserve]
   - Ladd and Hadley, chpt. 1 [e-reserve]

2. Recent changes in the American electorate (April 21-28)
   - Schreckhise and Shields, “Ideological Realignment in the Contemporary U.S. Electorate Revisited,” *SSQ* (September 2003) [e-reserve]
   - Fiorina, et al., chpts. 1-3 [e-reserve]

H. Voting behavior in congressional elections (April 30 - May 3)

- Jacobson, chpt. 5 [e-reserve]
- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpts. 9-11

I. Summing up and future prospects (May 4)

- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 12