SYLLABUS

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 future presidential and congressional elections?

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 attitudes and orientations 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 and interpret survey data in order to investigate individual voting behavior.

Books

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

A. Abramowitz, The Disappearing Center, chpt. 5.
L. Bartels, Unequal Democracy, chpt. 3.

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 2012 presidential election:

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 2012 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 2012, based on an analysis of survey data from the 2012 election. Details on this paper will be distributed at the start of the semester. 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. One important point about the class sessions: we will spend time interpreting tables and charts in the readings (especially when I think that you may have difficulty in properly interpreting them on your own), so bring the books or copies of the reserve readings (if you printed them off) to class on the appropriate days.

The course grade will be determined by a point system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading summaries (10 x 10 points each)</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper on social factors and voting</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper on attitudes and voting, first draft</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper on attitudes and voting, final draft</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>500 points</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. All of the assigned readings that are on e-reserve are also listed on page 2 of this syllabus.

The readings from the book by Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde focus on the 2008 election. If you want to refresh your memory of that election, skim chapters 2 and 3 of that book to review the events and outcome of the 2008 presidential election. I also have placed four books on the 2012 election on closed reserve, so you can consult them if you need more information on the issues, events, and candidates in that election.

A. Turnout in national elections (August 21-26)

Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 1, 2
Campbell et al., The American Voter, chpt. 5 [e-reserve]
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 4

B. Party identification (Sept. 4-11)

Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 3 (pp. 67-72) and 4
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 8
Lewis-Beck et al., The American Voter Revisited, chpt. 7 [e-reserve]

C. Analyzing data from the 2008 election (Sept. 13-20)

Examine the material on the Voting Behavior: The 2012 Election SETUPS Web site (www.icpsr.umich.edu/SETUPS)

D. Social factors and the vote (Sept. 23-27)

Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 5
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 5
Lewis-Beck et al., The American Voter Revisited, chpt 11 [e-reserve]

E. Attitudinal basis of the vote (Sept. 30 to Oct. 4)

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

1. The role of policy issues in elections (Oct. 7-18)

Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 6 and chpt. 7 (pp. 173-186)
Campbell et al., The American Voter, chpt. 8 [e-reserve]
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 6
Hillygus and Shields, The Persuadable Voter, chpt. 2 [e-reserve]
Bartels, Unequal Democracy, chpt. 3 [e-reserve]

2. Retrospective evaluations and voting behavior (Oct. 21-25)

Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 7
Markus, “The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on the Presidential Vote,” AJPS (Feb., 1988) [e-reserve]
Abramowitz, “Forecasting the 2008 Presidential Election...” in PS (Oct., 2008) and Erickson and Wlezien, “The Objective and Subjective Economy....” in PS (Oct., 2012) [e-reserve]

3. The influence of perceptions of candidate characteristics (Oct. 28 to Nov. 1)

Miller and Shanks, The New American Voter, chpt. 15 [e-reserve]
Prybys, “Perceptions of Candidate Character Traits and the Presidential Vote in 2004,” PS (January, 2008) [e-reserve]
Keeter, “The Illusion of Intimacy,” POQ (Fall, 1987) [e-reserve]

G. Aspects of electoral dynamics

1. Short-run versus long-term electoral change (Nov. 4-8)

Flanigan and Zingale, chpt. 3 (pp. 72-87)
Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System, chpt. 1 [e-reserve]
Ladd and Hadley, Transformations of the American Party System, chpt. 1 [e-reserve]

2. Recent changes in the American electorate (Nov. 11-13)

Abramowitz, “Ideological Realignment Among Voters,” in Stonecash (ed.), New Directions in American Political Parties. [e-reserve]
Abramowitz and Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?” JOP (April, 2008) [e-reserve]

H. Voting behavior in congressional elections (Nov. 15-20)

Jacobson, The Politics of Congressional Elections, chpt. 5 [e-reserve]
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpts. 9-11

I. Summing up and future prospects: looking forward to the 2012 election (Nov. 22 to Dec. 2)

Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, chpt. 12
Abramowitz, The Disappearing Center, chpt. 5 [e-reserve]