This course examines the electoral behavior of the American public and the interpretation of election outcomes. Students will
(1) read and discuss the relevant literature
(2) prepare a short informal paper analyzing data from the 2008 presidential election
(3) write thought papers on the readings for selected weeks
(4) write a research paper on voting and elections.

No exams are intended. However, the instructors may administer a final exam if the need arises.

Grades: Class discussion and presentations: 15% Data analysis exercise 15%
Thought Papers 30% Research Paper 40%

Classes will be mixes of lecture and discussion. On a regular basis, students will be assigned to lead the class discussions about certain research questions or assigned readings. Typically, students will be asked to lead the discussion regarding one or more of the week’s “papers for discussion.”

Data analysis exercise. Students will write a short paper, 5-7 pages of text, plus 2-4 pages of supporting graphs and tables. This paper will analyze data from the 2008 election. Otherwise the project is open-ended. The analysis can be exploratory and the research question is something of interest to you. The data sources are the 2008 American National Election Study (NES) and the 2008 National Election Pool Exit Poll (NEP) data sets, although other data can be used. It is assumed that students are familiar with the rudiments of data analysis (or are concurrently enrolled in a basic data analysis course). We will use the statistical package STATA. Knowledge of STATA is not assumed, but it is easy to learn. Students who prefer working in SPSS or some other statistical software are free to do so. Students can work on STATA in most of the CUIT labs (e.g., in IAB). Data analysis exercises are due October 27.

Thought papers: Each student will write thought papers based on readings for the week. These are intended to be short, about 4 pages, and are intended to be unstructured. They are due the day the readings are discussed. The three thought papers with the best grade will be counted. Thus, students may choose not to turn in thought papers for each of the 10 weeks. In other words, turn in a thought paper for three or more sessions, with only the best three counting.

Research papers: Each student will write a research paper. It can take one of the two forms listed below. Periodically we will devote class time to discussion of the progress of research papers. Final versions of the papers are due on December 20, 2010.

Data Analysis paper: This is intended as a short, creative, data analysis exercise. Students choose the question and the data. The data may be surveys or aggregate analysis. The subject matter is open, except that the paper should have something to do with elections or electoral behavior. Expected Length: About 15-20 pages of text plus supporting data analysis.

Literature Review. A critical review of some topic in the study of voting and elections, preferably one that has provoked disagreement among scholars. Students choose the topic. Expected Length: About 25 pages. Ordinarily, the literature review will not contain its own original data analysis. However, there may be exceptions, as when the reviewer re-analyzes the author’s original data.
Readings:

*Required books.* Three books (*Change and Continuity, American Public Opinion, Congressional Elections*) are standard upper-division undergraduate texts, useful for background reading about electoral politics. *The American Voter Revisited* is a recent homage to the classic *The American Voter* (1960) by four former students of the original authors. The remaining three books are recent entries that have had considerable influence on the current discussion of electoral politics.

*Articles for discussion.* The reading list also includes a set of “articles for discussion.” These are contemporary articles about electoral politics from leading journals. Sometimes rather technical, they represent the cutting edge of current research. Students will be assigned to lead discussions of these articles, which are all available on line via Columbia library e-journals. The list is not set in stone; we might revise the list as new information comes to our attention.

*Required books:*


Weekly topics:

Sept. 5. Introduction. Brief meeting
Sept. 12. The Study of Elections
Sept. 19. Public Opinion
Sept. 26 Voter Turnout
Oct. 3. Party Identification
Oct. 10. What Motivates Voter’s Candidate Choices?
Oct. 17. Explaining Election Outcomes
Oct. 24. Congressional Elections
Oct. 31. Elections and Representation
Nov. 7. Election Post-Mortem: What happened?
Nov. 14. Contemporary Controversies: Growing Polarization?
Nov. 21. No Class. Preparation of student papers.
Nov. 28. Presentation of Student Papers
Dec. 5. Presentation of Student Papers

Sept. 12: The Study of Elections

Readings:

Lewis-Beck et al., The American Voter Revisited,
   Chapter 1. “Setting”
   Chapter 2. “Theoretical Orientation”
   Chapter 3. “Perceptions of the Parties and Candidates”

The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior. Available at
http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/electoralbehavior.pdf


*For further reading:*

   Chapter 2: Converse, "The Concept of the Normal Vote."
   Chapter 3: Campbell, "Surge and Decline."
   Chapter 4: Campbell, "A Classification of Presidential Elections"


**Sept. 19: Public Opinion**

*Readings:*


Lewis-Beck et al., *The American Voter Revisited*,
   Chapter 9. “Attitude Structure and the Problem of Ideology”

Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*.
   Chapter 6. “Homer Gets a Tax Cut”

*Articles for discussion:*


*For further reading:*


Chapter 1. Kinder, “Belief Systems after Converse”


Chapter 10. Zaller, “Coming to Grips with V.O.Key’s Concept of Latent Opinion.”


**Sept. 26: Voter Turnout**

*Readings:*


*Articles for discussion:*


For further reading:


October 3: **Party Identification**

**Readings:**


Lewis-Beck, et al., *American Voter Revisited*


Articles for discussion:


For further reading:


Oct. 10: What Motivates Voters’ Candidate Choices?

Readings:

Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections.
Chapter 5. “Social Forces and the Vote”
Chapter 7. “Presidential Performance and Candidate Choice.”


Lewis-Beck et al. The American Voter Revisited. Chapters 8, 11-14

Articles for discussion:


For further reading


Oct. 17: Explaining Election Outcomes

Readings:


Bartels, Unequal Democracy, Chapter 4. “Partisan Biases in Economic Accountability”

Articles for discussion:


For further reading:


Elections.” 166-188.


Oct. 24: Congressional Elections

Readings:


Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, Change and Continuity in the 2008 Elections. 
   Chapter 9. “Candidates and Outcomes in 2008”


Articles for discussion:


For further reading:


Oct. 31: **Elections and Representation**

**Readings:**

Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson. *The Macro Polity:* Chapters 9, 11. TO BE AVAILABLE ON COURSWORKS.


Bartels, *Unequal Democracy.*


Chapter 9. “Economic Inequality and Political Representation”

Chapter 10. “Unequal Democracy.”

**Articles for discussion:**


For further reading:


Nov. 14: Contemporary Issues: Growing Polarization?


Alan Abramowitz. *The Disappearing Center Entire.*


Further reading:


