POLS 4155 Voting and Elections

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11–1 and Thursdays 1–2
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Course Description
Elections play a central role in the functioning of democracies. Their outcomes are often interpreted as representing the “will of the people.” However, there are reasons to question this common interpretation. This course examines such questions, including: Are individual voters capable of making “rational” decisions? What does it mean for the majority to prefer one alternative over another and can it even do so? And, why do people vote? More broadly, we will seek to answer the question—are elections informative in the way think they are? In short, the goal of this course is to understand what elections mean in modern democracies. We will examine the electorate at the level of individuals as well as look at overall trends and patterns.

Texts
There are three primary books we’ll be using in class. They are:


Additionally, there will periodically be readings from other sources. These will be posted on iCollege.

Grades
Exams 40%
Paper 30%
Memos 15%
Participation 15%

Exams
There will be two exams for a total of 40% of the course grade. The format will be a mix of short answer and essay questions.

Research Paper
Each student will examine some topic, with consultation from me, involving some aspect of voting behavior or elections. A handout regarding the paper will give more detailed information. Due 12/6.

Memos
Each student will write three response memos during the semester. The purpose of these memos is to offer a critical analysis of the day’s readings. These should be about two pages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Aug 29</td>
<td>Class cancelled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 3</td>
<td>Methods of analysis and a brief history lesson</td>
<td>Shepsle, ch. 1&lt;br&gt;Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 1 (p. 3-13) and 2 (p. 19-26)</td>
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<td>Sept 5</td>
<td>Individual and collective rationality: are election outcomes meaningful?</td>
<td>Shepsle, ch. 2 and 4 (p. 53-61; 67-74; 76-86)</td>
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<td>Sept 10</td>
<td>Why bother to turnout? The paradox of voting</td>
<td>Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 2 and ch. 4</td>
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<td>Sept 12</td>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 6 (p. 111-127) and 7 (p. 138-156)</td>
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<td>Sept 17</td>
<td>The “problem” of ideology</td>
<td>Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 9</td>
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<td>Sept 19</td>
<td>A spatial representation of voting and elections</td>
<td>Shepsle, ch. 5: p. 90, 110-123</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 24</td>
<td>The impact of political information</td>
<td>Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 5, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 26</td>
<td>The impact of political information</td>
<td>Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 8</td>
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<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>The media</td>
<td>Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 3, 6</td>
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<td>Oct 10</td>
<td>Strategic voting</td>
<td>Shepsle, ch. 6 (156-170, 174-179)</td>
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<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Rationality and third party candidates: the case of Ross Perot</td>
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Oct 17 Vote-seat curves: translating votes into seats

Oct 22 Exam One

Oct 24 The economy and election outcomes
Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 9, 10

Oct 29 The economy and election outcomes

Oct 31 Presidential nominations
Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. *The Party Decides*. Ch. 1

Nov 5 Presidential nominations
Cohen et al. *The Party Decides*. Ch. 6

Nov 7 Issues opinions and public policy
Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 8 (p. 161-185) and 10 (p. 254-256; 260-280)

Nov 12 The voting booth
Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 14

Nov 14 The impact of elite polarization on political choices
Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 12, 13

Nov 19 The impact of elite polarization on political choices
Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 14, 15

Nov 21 Behavior of the electorate
Lewis-Beck et al., ch. 15 (p. 415-423)

Nov 26 Thanksgiving break
Nov 28 Thanksgiving break
Dec 3  Party system change  
  Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 18, 19

Dec 5  Party system change  
  Neimi and Weisberg, ch. 20, 21

Dec 12  Exam Two @ 8:00–10:30

Class Policies
Make-up Policy
Make-up exams will only be given for university-approved reasons. Written documentation for the excuse is required and I must, barring some extraordinary circumstance, approve your excuse before the exam. If you fail to get my approval before the scheduled time for the exam, you will receive a zero.

Entering Exam Late
You cannot start the exam if you enter the classroom after at least one person has already finished.

Academic Honesty
All work must be your own. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing assignments will receive a zero for the exam or assignment and possibly the course and will be punished in accordance with Georgia State University policies (for details, see the GSU student code of conduct: http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwdos/codeofconduct.html).

Drop Date
Be advised that the last day to withdraw from a course with the possibility of receiving a ‘W’ is October 9. If a student withdraws by this date but is failing the course, he/she will receive a ‘WF.’ All students who withdraw after this date will receive a ‘WF.’

Participation
While attendance is expected but not formally required, participation is an important component of the overall grade. I expect that when in class individuals will be respectful of their fellow students and will therefore refrain from using laptops in a distracting manner (e.g., Facebook, Youtube) and cell phones altogether. A pattern of disregarding these rules will affect one’s participation grade.

Recording Lecture
If you planned on recording lectures, please run that by me.

Grade Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
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