This course will examine the major theories of voting in U.S. elections, as well as the evidence for those theories. We will start with models of political socialization, then consider what could be considered its primary competitor: the standard spatial model of voting which is based on the issue positions of voters and candidates. We also consider the effects of the economy on elections: looking both at standard reward-punishment models voters could follow, as well as more modern political-economy variants considering the macro-economy more completely. We then consider the role of information and uncertainty in elections: how voters acquire information, and how uncertainty about candidates’ positions influences voter behavior. Finally we consider strategic calculations of both voters and parties.

The course will consist of a mix of lectures and student presentations. Each week 1 or more students will be selected to present some portion of the week’s reading, and turn in a short (2-3 page) paper.

Your grade will be based on the following

- Class Participation: 15%
- Short Papers: 35%
- Final Paper (12-15 pages): 50%

Required Reading:


Week 1: Course Overview and Voting Overview

- Lecture on Elections Research

Weeks 2 - 4: Early (Psychological Attachment) Models of Voting

  - Chapter 2) Theoretical Orientation
  - Chapter 3) Perceptions of the Parties and Candidates
  - Chapter 4) Partisan Choice
  - Chapters 6-10) Impact of Party ID, Ideology, Issues
  - Chapters 12-14) Groups, Class, Economic Antecedents of Behavior

  - Chapters 6-10) New Issues, Conceptualization, Issue Consistency

Week 5: The Spatial Model

  - Chapter 1: The analysis of Politics
  - Chapter 2: The Spatial Model of Downs and Black: One Policy Dimension;
  - Chapter 3: Two Dimensions; Multiple Dimensions:
  - Chapter 4: Multiple Dimensions
Weeks 6-8 : Economic Voting

- Lecture:
  - Time series results on the economy and voting for President (Tufte; Erikson) and Congress (Kramer).
  - Voting based on perceptions of personal finances versus perceptions of the national economy (Kiewiet and Kinder).
  - Individual level models incorporating both issues and perceptions of the economy (Alvarez and Nagler).

  - Chapter 1: Overview
  - Chapter 2: Opportunistic Models
  - Chapter 3: Partisan Models
  - Chapter 4: Political Cycles in the United States
  - Chapter 5: Polls, Electoral Uncertainty, and the Economy
  - Chapter 6: Political Cycles in Industrial Economies
  - Chapter 7: *Political Cycles and Macroeconomic Policies: Evidence from Industrial Democracies*


Weeks 9-10 : Information

- Lecture:
  - Models of information reception and processing (Zaller).


  - Chapter 6: Uncertainty and Policy Preference
Week 11 : Electoral Systems

- Lecture:
  - Empirical evidence on strategic voting in Britain (Alvarez and Nagler)
  - Empirical evidence on strategic voting in California Primaries (Alvarez and Nagler)


  - Chapter 5: Social Choice and Other Voting Models.
  - Chapter 8: Strategic Voting, Nonseparability, and Probabilistic Voting

Week 12 : Advertising