Voters in America

Dr. Paul Goren
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Course meets TTh 10:40-11:55, Lattie Coor Hall L1-20
Office Hours: M 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

Course Overview: This course analyzes systematically the factors that influence political participation and electoral choice among American voters. Specifically, we focus on (1) contextual, demographic, and psychological factors that affect the likelihood a citizen will participate in politics; (2) contextual and psychological factors that affect the likelihood a voter will cast a ballot for the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate; and (3) contextual and psychological factors that affect the likelihood a voter will cast a ballot for Democratic or Republican congressional candidates.

Requirements:
Attendance and Participation: You are expected to attend class regularly, read all of the assigned materials, and make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Students who do not attend class will find it extremely hard to do well in this course.

Exams: There will be two in-class exams and a final exam. The first exam is scheduled for Thursday, September 30; the second for Thursday, November 4; and the final for Friday, December 10 (10:00-11:50). Study guides will be provided in the Tuesday class that precedes each exam. The exams will include multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and long essays. If an emergency prevents you from taking an exam, you must contact me as soon as possible, explain the nature of the emergency, and present documentation verifying the explanation. If the emergency is legitimate, you will be eligible to take a make-up exam. If not, you will receive a 0 for the exam. Make up exams will include definitions and essays.

Paper: You are required to write a 10-12 page paper that (1) summarizes the main arguments in the Popkin and Marcus et al. books (see below) regarding voting behavior and voter competence; (2) compares and contrasts the Popkin and Marcus arguments with one another; and (3) compares and contrasts the Popkin and Marcus arguments with the arguments about voting behavior and voter competence I develop and present during the second part of the course (see below). Students who provide accurate and comprehensive summaries of the books, creatively and thoughtfully compare and contrast the various perspectives, and meet the length requirements will receive high marks. The paper is to be completed without the aid of your classmates. A hard copy of the paper is due at the beginning of class on December 7 (electronic copies will not be accepted). Late papers will be penalized.
Grading:

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>First exam</td>
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<td>Second exam</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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<td>Paper</td>
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**Cheating:** Anyone caught cheating or plagiarizing will be sanctioned in accordance with university policies. The minimum penalty will be a 0 grade for the work in question.

**Textbooks:** The following texts are required for this course and can be purchased at campus bookstores or from internet book retailers.


**Course Schedule:**

**Part I: Political Participation**

**Topics:**
- Survey research methods
- Contextual factors affecting participation
  - Laws and regulations
  - Political and social organizations
- Demographic factors affecting participation
  - Race
  - Gender
  - Socioeconomic status
- Psychological factors affecting participation
  - Political knowledge
  - Partisan and ideological identifications

**Readings:**
- Flanigan and Zingale - chapters 1,2, and appendix
- Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde - chapter 4
Part II: Electoral Choice in Presidential Elections

Topics:
Contextual factors affecting the presidential vote
  Media
  Campaigns
Psychological factors affecting the presidential vote
  Partisan and ideological identifications
  Retrospective assessments of national conditions
  Issue attitudes
  Personality traits

Readings:
Flanigan and Zingale - chapters 3-6, 8
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde - chapters 1-3, 6-8

Part III: Electoral Choice in Congressional Elections

Topics:
Contextual factors affecting House and Senate votes
  National conditions
  Incumbency
  Media
  Campaigns
Psychological factors affecting House and Senate votes
  Partisan and ideological identifications
  Retrospective assessments of national conditions

Readings:
Flanigan and Zingale – supplemental chapters 2-4
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde - chapters 9-11
Fenno - introduction, chapters 1-7