Course Overview: This course analyzes the factors that influence political participation and voter decision making among American citizens. Specifically, we focus on the (1) contextual, demographic, and psychological factors that affect the likelihood a citizen will get involved in some manner in the world of public affairs; (2) the latent psychological factors that motivate a voter to cast a ballot for either the Democratic or Republican presidential nominee; and (3) the implications these processes have for assessing voter competence.

Requirements:
Attendance, Preparation, and Participation: Students are expected to complete and understand the readings, attend class on a regular basis, and contribute to classroom discussions.

Exams: There will be three in-class exams based on the readings and class materials. The exams will include multiple choice and short answer questions. The schedule is as follows:

- 1st exam: Tuesday, September 27th
- 2nd exam: Tuesday, November 1st
- 3rd exam (final exam): Tuesday December 13th, 12:20-2:10

Make up Policy: If an emergency prevents you from taking the first or second exam, you must contact me prior to the exam, explain the nature of the emergency, and subsequently present documentation verifying the explanation. If the emergency proves valid you will not be penalized, and your course grade will reflect your performance on the other exams. Invalid excuses will result in a 0 score for the missed exam. Everyone is required to take the final.

Paper: You are required to write an 8-10 page paper that (1) summarizes the main arguments in the Samuel Popkin book, The Reasoning Voter (see below) about the underlying psychological factors that lead individuals to choose one presidential candidate over another and the degree to which his arguments take a positive or negative view of most voters (2) compares and contrasts Popkin’s arguments with those developed by Angus Campbell and his colleagues in The American Voter (see below). Students who provide accurate and comprehensive summaries of the books, compare and contrast them in a thoughtful and creative manner, 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 the December 6 class. Electronic copies will not be accepted and late papers will be penalized.

Grading: Your final course grade will be based on the following weights:

1. 1st exam: 20%
2. 2nd exam: 20%
3. 3rd exam (final): 30%
4. Paper: 30%
Textbooks: The following texts are required for this course and can be purchased at campus bookstores or from internet book retailers.


Cheating: Anyone caught cheating on the exams will be sanctioned in accordance with university policies. The minimum penalty will be a 0 grade on the exam.

Course Schedule:

Part I: Political Participation

- Political activism
- Modes of participation
- Economic factors and participation
- Social demographic factors and participation
- Socioeconomic factors and participation
- Resources and participation
- Civic skills and participation

Part II: The Determinants of voter choice in presidential elections

- Partisan and ideological predispositions
- Domestic and foreign policy preferences
- Retrospective evaluations of national and international conditions
- Character traits
- Political knowledge