POL-UA 344 - The Election Process
T/Th, 3:30-4:45, 25 W 4th - Room C20

Professor Jonathan Nagler   **Fall, 2016**
Office: 19 W. 4th Street, Room 307   **Phone: 992-9676**

This course is about elections in America. Elections have 3 essential ingredients: rules, voters, and candidates. This course focuses mainly on voters and candidates, we take the rules of American elections as given. We will look at some central areas of voter behavior in US elections: a) the importance of party identification – where voters get it, and what they do with it; b) the impact of voters' issue positions on their vote choice and their party-id; c) the role of votes' demographic characteristics in predicting (and perhaps influencing) their vote-choice; and d) the role of the economy in influencing vote-choice. We will look at forecasting models of elections. And we will look at candidate behavior thru the lens of the spatial model. If time allows, we will consider the process of campaigns: how do campaigns get information, and the role of polling in campaigns. And we will look (a little) at the role of campaign spending.

At the end of the class we want to be able to answer a simple question: why do people vote the way they do? [The question is simple, the answer is not.]

Because much of what you read contains statistical analyses, we will cover some basic aspects of statistical analysis at the beginning of the course. This is intended to make the later readings more informative.

The best way to contact me is via email (jonathan.nagler@nyu.edu). Office hours this semester are Thursdays 2:15-3:15, or by appointment.

Course Assignments:

1. Class participation [may include written component] (15%).
2. Midterm Exam # 1 (20%)
3. Midterm Exam # 2 (20%)
4. Solo Short Paper (10%)
5. Group Presentation and Paper (35%)

More details will be forthcoming on the group project. The key aspect of the group project is that you will *do research.* You will form groups of from 6-8 students to analyze some aspect of the 2016 election, *comparing it* to 2012 or another presidential election [*]. You may want to look at public opinion on specific policies, evaluations of the candidates, ideological placement of the candidates, or evaluations of the economy. Or you may want to look at campaign strategies. Each group will need to produce a hypothesis, and test it using *evidence* that the group collects. The evidence can be a mix of analysis of media coverage, opinion polls, exit polls, state or county level election results, and anything else you can think of that is relevant. Each group will produce a a paper, and make a presentation in class. [*]You can choose to analyze a different election!

You will be evaluated based on several criteria. You should have a clear statement of your thesis or hypothesis. You should consider alternative hypotheses to what you are presenting. You should be very clear on where your data come from, and what sources you are using. You should clearly describe how you analyze any data you acquire. And you should explain your conclusions in a clear manner, and describe how consistent they are, or are not, with conventional wisdom (if any exists).

Other than the texts mentioned below, readings will be provided online via NYU-CLASSES, *or* you may be instructed to download journal articles from sources NYU has access to.

Texts Available Electronically:

Who Votes Now: Demographics, Issues, Inequality and Turnout in the United States, Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler, Princeton University Press, 2013 (ISBN: 9780691159355)

Data and Democracy, Therriault, Andrew (ed), 2016, O'Reilly Press, (ISBN: 978-1-491-95905-3).

There is an optional text available: *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis, 2nd edition*, Pollock, CQ Press (ISBN-0: 1608716716; ISBN-13: 978-1608716715). You may find this useful if you do quantitative work for your course project. You would probably find the first edition to be helpful as well, but not quite as up to date.

The order of topics listed below could change a little. You need to keep up with the schedule as announced in class, and/or via email and/or NYU-CLASSES!

Topics Covered

[**Sep 6-8**] **Voter Decision Making:** We are going to take a look here at the process leading up to the decision in the voting booth, with the famous 'funnel of causality' from *The American Voter.* Some things that influence voting behavior occur close to election time, other influences occur further away.

- **READING:**

    1. *The American Voter*, Chapter 2, "Theoretical Orientation".

[**Sep 13**] **Predicting the 2012 Elections:** We can try to predict the share of the national vote one candidate will get. These predictions are modelled on combinations of economic indicators and public opinion (presidential approval and consumer confidence). Note that these predictions do *not* depend on knowing about what the presidential campaigns do.

- **READINGS:**

    1. "Editor's Introduction: Forecasting the 2012 National Elections," Campbell, *PS*, 2012.
    2. "Forecasting in a Polarized Era: The Time for a Change Model and the 2012 Presidential Electionl," Abramowitz, *PS*, 2012.
    3. "Forecasting the Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2012: The Trial-Heat and the Seats-in-Trouble Models," Campbell, *PS*, 2012.

[**Sep 15-17**] **Data Analysis and Statistical Inference:** Tables, correlations, and 'controlling for other factors'. We can not fit a statistics class inside a class on political behavior. But by doing a little work to understand how data is presented, and the simple logic of 'control variables' and spurious relationships – you can get take a big step towards developing an analytic understanding of Politcs.

- **READING AND LECTURES:**

    1. *Statistics*, by Freedman, et-al, 4th edition. Read Chapters 1 and 2.
    2. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Pollock, Chapter 4, "Research Design and the Logic of Control" [Read Chapter 4, pages 79-93 in the 3rd edition.]
    3. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Pollock, Chapter 5, "Making Controlled Comparisons". [Read Chapter 5, pgs 94-107 in the 3rd edition.]
    4. *The Cartoon Guide to Statistics*, Chapter 11, Regression, only pages 187-198, 203-208 (you can skip other pages).

[**Sep 26 - 30 (A)**] **Party ID (and issues):** Where Does Party Identification Come From? There are two major strains of thought, each with 2 different variations within them. First, it can be thought of as a psychological attachment. This is closely related to it as a sociological (group-based) phenomenon. Second, it could be issue or performance based. Voters could choose their party-id based on the performance of the party in office: where performance might be measured based on economic outcomes (more or less economic growth), or on policy outcomes (delivering on a civil rights agenda). Rather than *performance*, one could also choose based on proximity on the issues.

- **READING AND LECTURES:**

  1. *The American Voter*, Chapter 7, "Development of Party-ID".
  2. *Lecture:* Transmission of Party ID.
  3. *Lecture:* Importance of Issues in development of Party Identification.

[Sep 26 - 30 (B)] Issues and the Vote: The issue positions of voters, combined with the issue positions of parties, is crucial to vote choice. All other things being equal, voters tend to vote for the party they are closest to. This is the fundamental statement of the spatial model – which informs our understanding of the role that issues play in elections. But issues can lie on different *dimensions*: some people think of politics as lying on one dimension (generally abbreviated as left-right ideology); other people think that politics has two distinct dimensions: a set of social issues and a set of economic issues. The economic issues are often issues of redistribution, or of 'the size of the state.'

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

  1. The impact of issues on vote choice.
  2. The spatial model
  3. *Change and Continuity*, Chapter 6, "Candidates, Issues, and Votes".

[Oct 3 - 7] Issues, Spatial Model - Part II

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

  1. "Economics, Issues, and The Perot Candidacy: Voter Choice in the 1992 Election," Alvarez and Nagler, *AJPS*, 1995.
  2. *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 5 (selected pages), "The Spatial Model", p. 82-115.

[Oct 3 - 7] Issues, Candidates and Turnout: The issues offered voters influence their decision to vote.

- **READINGS AND LECTURES**:

  1. *Who Votes Now*, Chapter 5-7: Policy Choices and Turnout, On the Representativeness of Voters, and Conclusion. [*Who Votes Now* is available electronically from Bobst, so you will not find it on the CLASSES website.]

[Oct 10-14] Moral Values vs Economic Values - Kansas

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

  1. *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Frank, chapters 1, 3, 5, and 6.
  2. "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas", *QJPS*, Bartels.

[October 18 - Tuesday] MIDTERM

[Oct 20] Group Class Presentation of Hypotheses, Research Design, and Data Collection Plan

[Oct 20, then Oct 26] Vote Choice by Demographics and by PID: Who votes for whom? Do all self-identified Democrats vote for the Democratic candidate in every election? If not, how often do Democrats vote Democratic? Do different demographic groups vote differently? If so, can we identify factors correlated with those demographic characteristics to explain the vote-choice?

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

    1. Gelman, et-al, *QJPS*, "Red-State, Blue-State"
    2. Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996," Bartels, *AJPS*, 2000.
    3. "Explaining the Gender Gap in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1980-1992," Chaney, Alvarez, and Nagler, *PRQ*. [Optional]

[Oct 28] Economic Voting: The state of the economy has a huge impact on voter behavior. When the economy is good, voters reward the incumbent. When the economy is bad, voters punish the incumbent.

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

    1. Linn, Nagler, and Morales, "Economics, Elections, and Voting Behavior," in *Oxford Handbook*, 2010.
    2. **TBA**

[Oct 31 - Nov 4] Data, Polling (and Social Media): SNAFU - CURRENTLY MIXING POLLING, DATA, AND CAMPAIGNS]

- **READINGS AND LECTURES:**

    1. *Data and Democracy*, Selected Chapters.
    2. *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*, Issenberg, selected chapter(s).
    3. *Get Out the Vote*, Green and Gerber, 2nd edition, Chapter 12, "What Works, What Doesn't, and What's Next."
    4. *Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 6 - "Foundations of Statistical Inference." [Chapter 5 in 2nd edition]
    5. Focus Groups (including in-class viewing).
    6. Shea, *Campaign Craft*, Chapter 6 - "Prior Electoral Targeting".
    7. Shea, *Campaign Craft*, Chapter 7 - "Polling: The Focus of Strategic Vision".
    8. Social Media, *Reading TBA*

- **Lectures**

- How are polls conducted? Sampling frames, contact method, etc.
- Statistics of Polls.
- Question Wording.

- **Reading**

[Nov 14-18] Character Evaluations of Candidates and Money and Elections There is a huge amount of money spent in US elections. We will *very* briefly review the amounts spent in United States national elections, and talk about where it comes from.

- **READINGS AND LECTURES**

  1. **TBA1**
  2. **TBA2**

[Nov 22] Midterm 2

[Dec 6, 8, 13, 15] Class Presentations]

Presentations of Group Projects