

Political Science 4000-1 – Voting Behavior in US National Elections  
Spring Semester/2015; Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:50 in 145 Coates  
Dr. Christopher Kenny; Office: 228 Stubbs Hall  
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Office Hours: 10:30-12:00 T/Th and by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Elections are the most visible and scrutinized events in American politics. While some are more interesting and exciting than others, those that allow for the possibility of a change in partisan control of government are the most eagerly anticipated. The presidential nomination contests taking place this spring have that potential, as Republicans aspire to gain control of the White House through the nomination of their standard bearer. Democrats on the other hand, seek to nominate a candidate who can keep control of the presidency while helping the party to make inroads and perhaps even gain control of Congress. Given the raucous character of the nomination contests so far, this seems like the perfect time to examine the nature of elections and voting behavior in United States national elections.

The course is roughly grouped into four sections. In the first we will examine the importance of elections in democratic society, the major models of voting behavior and the manner in which parties nominate candidates for the presidency. In the second section we will focus mostly on the general election campaign and the voters who make up part of the strategic environment. The third section will examine groups, and social networks, candidates, issues, and campaign finance. Finally, in the fourth section we will look at political parties and party polarization and congressional elections before closing with a look towards the future. Throughout the course we will keep our eyes on the goings on in the current nomination contests, so it will be in your best interest to follow the various campaigns and outcomes through your favorite news outlets, blogs, or even old fashioned newspapers and television.

I would like to follow the format of an extended research seminar. This means that we will meet to discuss the readings and campaigns going on around the country. You need not have more than a basic understanding of American government to do this. You also, of course, need to attend class and be willing to consider questions seriously within the context of the systematic study of voting behavior. Since this is a class about voting and elections, you should also keep informed of what's going on in the national political scene. Reading a newspaper is perhaps the easiest and best way to accomplish this. The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, or The Los Angeles Times will provide information on the fall congressional races. Local news outlets will provide plenty of coverage for the Louisiana Senate race. You will also find good commentary and information from political blogs, like Nate Silver's 538, The Cook Political Report, Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball, and Politico, to name just a few. Real Clear Politics and other sights will have tons of polling data to peruse as well. I will gather these and other sites on moodle in the Internet Resources folder.

## TEXTBOOKS

*Change and Continuity in the 2012 and 2014 Elections*, by Abramson, Aldrich, Gomez, and Rohde.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are four examinations, two short writing assignments, and class participation composed of quizzes and discussion. The dates for exams and papers are listed on moodle, in the class schedule and reading assignments section.

Exams: Four multiple choice exams will be given. The final is not comprehensive. These exams will make up 60% of your grade (15% each).

Short Papers: Two short paper assignments of approximately 1000 words each will be given that will be worth 30% of your grade (15% each). I will discuss these on the first day of class.

Participation: I won't be taking attendance per se, but you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Participation will be composed of two parts (each accounting for 5% of your grade). The first part will be obtained through in class short quizzes. On random Thursdays I will take attendance by administering a short quiz (a question or two) over the readings for that week. There will be SIX of these quizzes, and you need to make at least FOUR of them to receive full credit for participation (5%). Making 3 of the quizzes will earn you 2.5 points for participation, and anything less than 3 will earn you 0 points. You can also obtain bonus points by getting correct answers to the quiz questions. For each correct quiz you can earn a quarter bonus point to be added to your final grade, so if you get all 6 correct you can earn 1.5 additional points to your course average. There will be no makeups on these quizzes since I've already given you two free misses. The second part (5%) will be composed of your actual contributions to class discussion. These will be self-reported by you. Any question or contribution you make to class discussion should be noted by turning in a sheet of paper listing these contributions at the end of each class period. Participation makes up 10% of your grade overall.

In summary, your grade breakdown is as follows:

Four Exams: 60%  
Two Short Papers: 30%  
Participation: 10%

## SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Standards of academic conduct are described in the University's Code of Student Conduct. By registering for this course you acknowledge your awareness of the Code, and your intention to follow the requirements of the Code. In short, don't cheat and don't plagiarize. Please see me if you have any questions about any aspect of the Code and how it relates to the specifics of this course.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

If you experience difficulties of any sort that impact your ability to fulfill the requirements of this course, please do not hesitate to talk to me. Additionally, LSU provides a wide range of services to help you succeed in your academic pursuits.

Disability Services (8-5919, 115 Johnson Hall, <http://disability.lsu.edu/>): Aids and services for students with disabilities.

Center for Academic Success (8-2872, B-31 Coates Hall, <http://cas.lsu.edu/>): Guidance and tutoring.

Career Center (8-2162, 158 and 258 LSU Student Union, <http://students.lsu.edu/careercenter/>): Career counseling.

LSU Cares (8-8607, 146 Thomas Boyd Hall, <http://studentlife.lsu.edu/lisu-cares/>): Physical health, disability, or depression.