

POLS-309: American Electoral Democracy
Mondays & Wednesdays 11:00AM - 12:15PM
DuSable Hall 459

Instructor: Timothy Márquez
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Office: DuSable 476
Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays
9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Course Description & Learning Outcomes

According to the college catalogue, this course will explore several facets of American Electoral Democracy, including voter eligibility, direct democracy, campaign finance, redistricting, the electoral college, and the mechanics of voting. Along the way, students will develop a deeper understanding of American political life.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Develop an academic vocabulary for discussing the electoral process;
2. Understand the rules of American elections;
3. Understand the changing role of parties in the electoral process;
4. Take part in many of the contentious debates regarding American elections;
5. Formulate thoughtful arguments on issues surrounding American electoral democracy.

Textbook and Resources

The textbook for this course is *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process* 7th ed. by Brewer & Maisel, ISBN 9781442249738. The textbook is designed with study strategies in mind. For example, there are critical thinking questions at the end of each chapter and a glossary of key terms at the end of the book. The text will be supplemented with additional readings posted to Blackboard, described below. If you wish to cite this textbook in your written work, you should cite it thus:

Brewer, Mark D. and L. Sandy Maisel. 2016. *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process 7th ed.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Blackboard will be used as an additional resource. Lecture notes, assignments, and grades will be posted on Blackboard. Also, the written assignments will be handed in via Blackboard's SafeAssign, which checks for plagiarism. If Blackboard is down when an assignment is due, you may send your assignment to the email address at the top of the page. However, Blackboard is

not a replacement for class attendance (which is required). Communications to and from me will typically come either via Blackboard or my email, tmarquez@niu.edu. For student privacy, I will only reply to a student's official NIU email (Z-ID@students.niu.edu). If you send me an email, put the class in the subject line (POLS-309).

Course Expectations

Students are expected to follow all college rules and adhere to the Student Code of Conduct. My rule for classroom conduct is this: you are not permitted to do anything that prevents me from teaching or prevents a student from learning. If you have any issues with the course, fellow students, or with the instructor, I ask that you attempt to resolve the problem with me before seeking remedy outside the classroom.

Students are prohibited from electronically recording class lectures and presentations (either by audio, video, picture, or otherwise) unless the instructor gives advance, written permission. If a student records the instructor without consent and uploads it to the internet, the student will be subject to discipline by the college, as well as potential legal liability.

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every class. An absence will be excused if the student can provide documentary proof of illness, a child's illness, an emergency, or participation in a college-sponsored event. Any student with five or more unexcused absences will receive a score of 0 on the participation portion of the final grade in the table below. Any student with nine or more unexcused absences will receive a failing grade. It is up to the student to provide documentation for an excused absence and find out what was missed.

Students faced with schedule conflicts related to a religious observance should make prior arrangements with the instructor a minimum of seven (7) school days in advance of the examination or other activity involved.

Critical Thinking and Class Discussion

Political Science is an academic discipline that studies systems of government and political activity. Political Science is not a platform for advancing a particular agenda. Very often it is the case that theory points in one direction, but the facts point in another. Critical thinking is an important skill for this class, and for citizenship in general. Here are some important guidelines for interpreting political statements:

- Does the speaker have an agenda, or an interest in the outcome? (Most do.)
- Does the speaker have sufficient evidence to support the statement?
- Are there concrete facts which contradict the statement?
- If the circumstances were different, would the reasoning still hold up?
- Is the speaker reasoning by analogy, and does the analogy hold up? (“What if...”
“Suppose that...”)

- Is the speaker stating a fact or interpreting a fact? (“In other words...” “So, what you’re saying is...”)
- Predicting an outcome and supporting an outcome are two different things.
- Criticizing a position doesn't mean the speaker supports a different position.
- Recognize conditional statements. (“If..., then...”)

Typically, during classroom discussion, anything that comes out of my mouth will be the opposite of what you or another student just said. I will challenge you to support your beliefs, and I expect you to challenge me as well. Classroom discussion depends upon the free exchange of ideas; you should feel free to constructively criticize anything I or someone else says, but be respectful to the individual. Focus on the statement or reasoning, not the person. The instructor has the authority to lower a student’s grade for disrupting the learning environment or refusal to participate in class discussion.

Final Grade Determination

Student performance will be evaluated according to a combination of metrics. There will be six essay assignments, an in-class final examination, and a score for class participation. The essay assignments will be submitted through Blackboard. The lowest essay score will be dropped. The writing prompts for the essays will be posted online at least two weeks before the due date. A rubric for the essays will be also posted on Blackboard and we will go over expectations in class. The final examination will take place in-class on Wednesday, December 13, 10-11:50 a.m. The examination will consist of 50 questions, with a mix between multiple choice and short answer. Students will be permitted to use 1 double-sided page of notes during the exam. There is no extra credit in this course.

| Assignment | Point Value |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Six essay assignments | 6 x 25 = 150 |
| Lowest essay score dropped | -25 |
| Final examination | 50 |
| Participation | 25 |
| Total | 200 |

NIU has adopted a plus/minus grading system. If you want to know your percentage grade, divide your total score by the total number of points, and multiply the quotient by 100. Grades will be distributed according to the following percentage scheme:

| Grade | Percentage | Grade | Percentage |
|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| A | 93-100% | C+ | 77-79% |
| A- | 90-92% | C | 73-76% |

| | | | | |
|----|--------|--|----|-----------|
| B+ | 87-89% | | C- | 70-72% |
| B | 83-86% | | D | 60-69% |
| B- | 80-82% | | F | Below 60% |

Due Dates & Tentative Course Outline

Due dates are listed in the following table. An assignment is due in Blackboard by 11:59PM of the due date. If you need an extension for any reason you must contact me before the assignment is due. Due dates will not be changed unless there is a school closing or other emergency.

| Assignment | Due Date |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Essay assignment 1 | September 15 |
| Essay assignment 2 | October 6 |
| Essay assignment 3 | October 20 |
| Essay assignment 4 | November 3 |
| Essay assignment 5 | December 1 |
| Essay Assignment 6 | December 14 |
| Final examination | Wed. December 13, 10-11:50 a.m. |

The due dates above are pretty firm. Conversely, the course outline below is more flexible. If I have reason to believe that the class is having trouble with a particular subject, I may spend more time on it. We will be covering a tremendous amount of information in sixteen weeks of class, so it is up to each student to keep up with the readings. Additionally, I may add some readings. If you are having trouble with a topic or concept, please let me know privately.

8/28-9/15: Introduction to American Electoral Democracy

Ch. 1 and pp. 40-45 of Brewer & Maisel

Ansolahehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2006. "Purple America." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(2):97-118.

Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 70:542-555.

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel A. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *Journal of Politics* 70:556-560.

9/18-10/6: Voting and Turnout

Ch. 3 of Brewer & Maisel

Fischer, Max. 2014. "A Political Scientist's Case Against Voting." *Vox* (On Blackboard).

McDonald, Michael P. and Samuel L. Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter." *The American Political Science Review* 95(4): 963-974.

Powell, G. Bingham. 1986. "American Voting Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80(1): 17-43.

Brians, Craig Leonard. 2005. "Women for Women? Gender and Party Bias in Voting for Female Candidates." *American Politics Research* 33(May): 357-375.

10/09-10/13: Campaign Finance

Ch. 5 of Brewer & Maisel

Streb, Matthew. "Campaign Finance." (On Blackboard.)

10/16-10/20: Redistricting and "Safe" Elections

Ch. 6 of Brewer & Maisel

McCaskill, Claire. 2015. "How I Helped Todd Akin Win — So I Could Beat Him Later." (On Blackboard.)

Streb, Matthew. "The Redistricting Process." (On Blackboard.)

Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders. 1998. "Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate." *Journal of Politics* 6:634-653.

10/23-11/03: State & Local Elections

Ch. 7 of Brewer & Maisel

Streb, Matthew. "The Offices We Elect." (On Blackboard.)

Geyh, Charles Gardner. 2003. "Why Judicial Elections Stink." *Ohio State Law Journal*, 64: 43-63.

Schaffner, Brian F. and Matthew J. Streb. 2002. "The Partisan Heuristic in Low-Information Elections." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66(4): 559-581.

Frederick, Brian J. and Matthew Streb. 2008. "Women running for judge: The impact of sex on candidate success in state intermediate appellate court elections." *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(4), 937-954.

11/06-11/10: Presidential Nominations

Ch. 8 of Brewer & Maisel

Friedersdorf, Conor. 2016. "How the Party Decided on Trump." (On Blackboard.)

Somin, Ilya. 2016. "Three issues I changed my mind about in 2016." (On Blackboard.)

Additional readings TBD

Skowronek, Stephen. 2016. "Is Donald Trump the Great Disruptor? Probably not." (On Blackboard.)

11/13-12/1: Presidential Elections

Ch. 9 of Brewer & Maisel

Campbell, James E. 1987. "The Revised Theory of Surge and Decline." *American Journal of Political Science* 31(4): 965-979.

Additional readings TBD

12/4-12/8: The Media

Ch. 10 of Brewer & Maisel

Additional readings TBD

Academic Dishonesty

In preparing for your work and meeting the requirements of this course, you are expected to adhere to all the rules, regulations, and standards set forth by the Department of Political Science, Northern Illinois University, and the scholarly community. This statement encompasses intentional and unintentional plagiarism; cheating on examinations; using, purchasing, or stealing others' work; misusing library materials; and so forth. The NIU Undergraduate Catalog states:

Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university. (Undergraduate Catalog)

If a student is found to have committed plagiarism on an essay, the student will have the opportunity to discuss the finding with me. If I am not satisfied with the explanation, a score of 0 will be given for the assignment. Punishments for plagiarism will be escalated if it happens more than once, up to and including giving a failing course grade. The Department of Political Science provides some resources to help you understand how to use citations and avoid plagiarism. These resources can be found at:

<http://www.niu.edu/polisci/audience/plagiarism.shtml>

Undergraduate Writing Awards

The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for \$100.00. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of

papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies must have two cover pages – one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published in the department e-announcements. You may also contact the department for information at 815-753-1015.

Department of Political Science Web Site

Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science website on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Center for Access-Ability Resources, (2) meet with the Center for Access-Ability Resources to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Center for Access-Ability Resources will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Center for Access-Ability Resources in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Center for Access-Ability Resources at 815-753-1303.