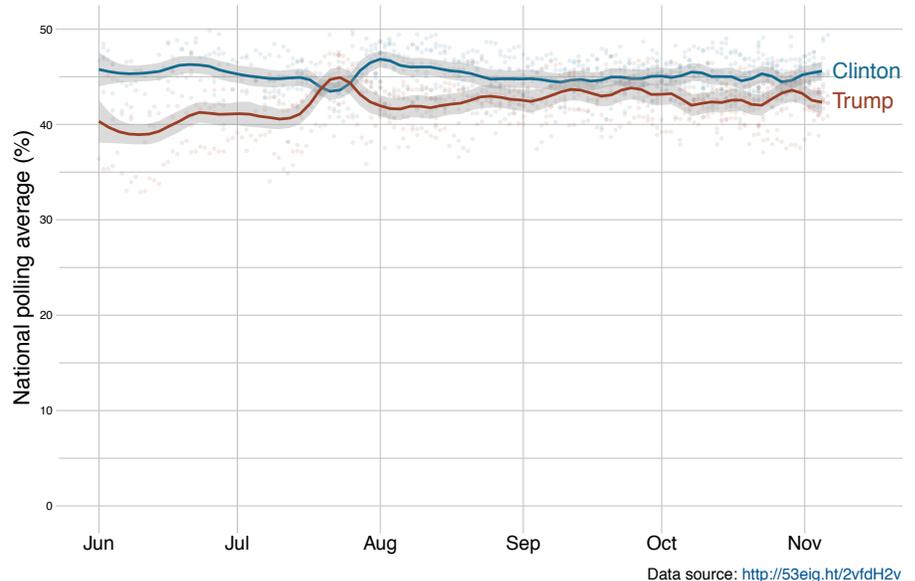


# POSC 324: VOTING & ELECTIONS

FALL 2019  
MWF 2.30-3.20  
GORE 222

*“Whatever your feelings about Trump (excitement, vindication, horror, nausea...), his election is a reminder of the unpredictability of democracy.”*

—Michelle Cottle, The Atlantic,  
November 22, 2016



While Cottle is right that elections provoke intense emotions, she’s wrong that this makes them unpredictable. In this course, we’ll unpack why voters make the decisions they do, why elections result in the winners and losers they do, and how campaigns spend their time and money as a consequence.

We’ll look beyond the media portrayal of fickle voters emotionally siding with a candidate at the last minute and of elections as hinging on attack ads and campaign gaffes. Instead, we’ll engage with classic academic theories of voting, and analyze empirical evidence from recent presidential and congressional elections, to understand in a more rigorous way why elections in the U.S. turn out the way they do.

## INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Prof. Phil Jones // [pejones@udel.edu](mailto:pejones@udel.edu) // [www.pejones.org](http://www.pejones.org)  
Office hours: MWF 11.10-12.00 // Smith 302

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

1. Understand, explain, and compare academic theories of voter behavior and election outcomes in the United States.

2. Analyze data from recent presidential and congressional elections to evaluate these theories.

3. Critically assess and reformulate popular/media accounts of voter behavior and election outcomes.

4. Synthesize course material to create an effective strategy, message, and TV commercial for a presidential campaign.

## HOW YOUR WORK WILL BE ASSESSED

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Your proficiency at the course learning outcomes will be assessed in various ways in the course. These will be weighted in your final grade as follows:

Exam #1	25%
Exam #2	25%
Collaborative Exercises (CEs)	20%
Campaigning for President simulation	20%
Class participation	5%
Reading quizzes	5%

More details about these assignments will be given in class and on Canvas.

Final letter grades will be assigned using the following cutoff points:

A	93	B+	87	C+	77	D+	67
A-	90	B	83	C	73	D	63
		B-	80	C-	70	D-	60

For the CEs, you will work in assigned groups to analyze empirical evidence. You will have the option of submitting a single response as a group (and receiving a single grade) or working together and then submitting individual responses (and receiving individual grades). Your lowest CE score and your lowest reading quiz score will be dropped from your grade at the end of the semester.

## ACTIVE LEARNING AND CLASS EXPECTATIONS

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Research shows that people learn better when classes are “active” rather than passive. Our classes will emphasize interactive discussions and group problem-solving. I expect everyone to engage with, and contribute to, the learning process. To facilitate this, let me make four expectations very clear:

1. I expect everyone to attend every meeting, having carefully read and thought about the assigned readings. Being present and prepared to learn is a minimum requirement for *passing* the course.
2. I expect you to arrive on time and to spend all of our class time in the room. Coming in late, or leaving during the class for bathroom or snack breaks, distracts me and your classmates from learning. We also miss an opportunity to learn from you if you're absent.
3. To ensure everyone is fully present, this class is an **electronics-free zone**. All laptops, tablets, and cellphones must be turned off and put away in regular class sessions, although you are free to use them during the Collaborative Exercises and Campaigning for President simulation. [Students who have a documented reason for laptop use should talk to me about accommodating your needs.]
4. If you are encountering difficulties in the class, come chat with me. See “office hours” below.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION

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Your participation is critical, both for your own learning and for others' in the class. For each of our regular class sessions, you will be scored as being either:

- Present and contributing to discussion [2 points];
- Present but not contributing to discussion [1 point];
- Not present [0 points]; *or*
- Not fully present (late, using cell phone/laptop, etc) [0 points]

Excused absences (see below) are treated as NAs. I will periodically update you on your scores; at the end of the semester these will be summed and then converted into a percentage of the highest score possible.

## OFFICE HOURS

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My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. These are set times that are blocked off on my schedule, dedicated for you. I will always be in my office during these times, and you should stop by at least once or twice this semester (*very occasionally* I have to reschedule, but I always send an email to the class when this happens). This is by far the best and easiest way to get feedback and help from me outside of class. We can talk about specific course material, review your work in the course, go over your plans for upcoming assignments, and so on. You do not need to make an appointment in advance; just stop by and say hi!

## ABSENCES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

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I expect you to attend every class session and complete every assignment for this course. You should familiarize yourself with [UD's policy on excused absences](#). If you have to miss a class, you should email me before the class begins to notify me of your absence. Absences due to religious holidays, participation in University extracurricular activities, and short-term illness are excused, provided you contact me first.

For absences that last more than two classes (due to family emergencies, illness, etc), you should contact the Assistant Dean's office of your College to document the reason for your absence. They will then send a letter of verification to all your professors, and I will excuse your absence.

I expect you to complete research assignments on time and in full. If you fail to do so, I will still accept your work. However, it will be subject to a 10% deduction for each calendar day it is overdue (beginning on the day it is due). Missed in-class assignments without an excused absence result in a score of zero.

Note well that in an era of free online backups, I will not accept computer failure as a valid excuse for missing any assignment deadline. You should get in the habit now of using a desktop-based backup system (e.g., Dropbox, iCloud) or cloud-based computing (e.g., Google Docs) for all your work.

## ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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Additional policies on academic honesty, disclosure of sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination, and the inclusion of diverse learning needs in the course can be found at the end of the syllabus.

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

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The schedule for this course is not set in stone, although it is very rare that I make changes during the semester, and never to assignment/exam dates except in emergency situations. Any changes will be announced in class and over email via Canvas. The exams and Collaborative Exercises dates are clearly **highlighted** in the schedule that follows; you will want to make good note of their dates now.

You should read each of the assigned readings *before* the class date they are listed under. You will have noticed there is no textbook for this course. That does not mean you should come to class empty-handed! I expect you to bring hard copies of the readings and/or *detailed* notes to aid in discussion.

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## INTRODUCTION

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8/28 Complete Introductory Student Survey via Qualtrics by 9am

8/28 Read: the syllabus, “What last year’s students want you to know about the course”, and “How to read political science: A guide in four steps” by Amelia Hoover Green

8/30 No class [Professor at APSA conference]

9/2 No class [Labor Day]

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## PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING VOTERS’ CHOICES

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### Voter knowledge and information-processing

- 9/4 Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper. [Extracts from “The basic logic of voting” and “The process of becoming informed”]  
Somin, I. (2016). *Democracy and political ignorance: Why smaller government is smarter*, 2nd Ed. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press. [Extracts from Ch1, “The extent of political ignorance” and Ch2, “Do voters know enough?”]
- 9/6 Popkin, S.L. (1995). Information shortcuts and the reasoning voter. In B. Grofman (Ed.), *Information, participation and choice: An economic theory of democracy in perspective*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. [Extract]
- 9/9 Strickland, A.A., Taber, C.S., & Lodge, M. (2011). Motivated reasoning and public opinion. *Journal of health politics, policy and law*, 36(6), 935-944.

### Turnout and the decision to vote

- 9/11 Barry, B. (1970). Political participation as rational action. In *Sociologists, economists, and democracy*. London, UK: MacMillan. [Extract]  
Geys, B. (2006). ‘Rational’ theories of voter turnout: A review. *Political studies review*, 4, 16-35. [Extract]
- 9/13 Verba, S., Schlozman, K.L., & Brady, H.E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Extracts]

## How voters choose I: Ideology and spatial voting

- 9/16 Re-read your notes from 9/4 on Downs' logic of voting.  
Evans, J. (2003). *Voters and voting: An introduction*. London, UK: Sage. ["Rational choice theories of voting"]

9/18 CE#1

## How voters choose II: Party identification

- 9/20 Campbell, A., Converse, P.E., Miller, W.E., & Stokes, D.E. (1960). *The American voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ["The impact of party identification"]

9/23 CE#2

- 9/25 Abramowitz, A.I., & Webster, S. (2015). "The rise of negative partisanship and the nationalization of U.S. elections in the 21st century". *Electoral Studies* 41: 12-22. [Extracts]

## How voters choose III: Retrospective voting

- 9/27 Fiorina, M.P. (1981). *Retrospective voting in American national elections*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. ["Theories of retrospective voting"]  
Abramson, P.R., Aldrich, J.H., Gomez, B.T., & Rohde, D.W. (2018). *Change and continuity in the 2016 elections*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. ["Presidential performance and candidate choice"]

9/30 CE#3

## How voters choose IV: Social group identities

- 10/2 Berelson, B.R., Lazarsfeld, P.F., & McPhee, W.N. (1954). *Voting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Extracts from "Social differentiation" and "Social process"]

10/4 CE#4

- 10/7 Tesler, M. (2016). "The education gap among whites this year wasn't about education. It was about race"; "How racially resentful working-class whites fled the Democratic Party — before Donald Trump"; and "Views about race mattered more in electing Trump than in electing Obama". *The Washington Post*. [Extracts]

10/9 Exam #1

- 10/11 No class [Fall break]

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## PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING ELECTION OUTCOMES

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### Presidential elections: Campaign effects and the fundamentals

- 10/14 Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The People's Choice*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. ["The activation effect"; "The reinforcement effect"; and "The conversion effect"]
- 10/16 Re-read your notes on retrospective voting.  
Campbell, J.E. (September 22, 2016). "Seeing the forest for the trees: Presidential election forecasts and the fundamentals". *Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball*.  
Bartels, L. (January 8, 2013). "Obama toes the line". *The Monkey Cage*.

### Primary elections: The party decides?

- 10/18 Cohen, M., Karol, D., Noel, H., & Zaller, J. (2008). The invisible primary in presidential nominations, 1980-2004. In Mayer, W.G. (Ed.), *The making of the presidential candidates 2008*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. [Extracts]

10/21 CE#5

### Congressional elections: Partisanship and district lines

- 10/23 Jacobson, G.C. (2019). "Extreme referendum: Donald Trump and the 2018 midterm elections". *Political Science Quarterly* 134: 9-38. [Extracts]

10/25 CE#6

- 10/28 Streb, M. J. (2016). *Rethinking American electoral democracy* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge. [Ch7, "The redistricting process"]

### State election laws: Turnout and voting reforms

- 10/30 Plumer, B. (November 8, 2016). "Why more than 80 million Americans won't vote on Election Day." *Vox*.  
Lopez, G. (January 24, 2017). "The simple truth about voter fraud." *Vox*.

11/1 CE#7

### Electoral systems and competition: Why third parties (almost) never win

- 11/4-6 Baumgartner, J.C., & Francia, P.L. (2016). *Conventional wisdom and American elections: Exploding myths, exploring misconceptions* (3rd ed.). New York: Rowman and Littlefield. ["End of the two-party system? The myth of the rise of third parties"]

11/8 Exam #2

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## PART THREE: UNDERSTANDING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

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### Campaign strategy

11/11 Re-read your notes on spatial voting.

Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper. ["The statics and dynamics of party ideologies"]

11/13 Re-read your notes from 10/16 on "the fundamentals".

Vavreck, L. (2009). *The message matters: The economy and presidential campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [Extracts]

### The rules of the game

11/15 Edwards, G.C. (2011). *Why the electoral college is bad for America* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. [Extract from Ch 2, "How the electoral college works"]

11/18- Campaigning for President simulation

12/4

## ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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### ACADEMIC HONESTY

I have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty of any kind. Please familiarize yourself with [UD's policies in this regard](#). To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, to re-submit the same assignment for different classes, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance.

### DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

If, at any time during this course, I happen to be made aware that a student may have been the victim of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic/dating violence, or stalking), I am obligated to inform the university's Title IX Coordinator. The university needs to know information about such incidents in order to offer resources to victims and to ensure a safe campus environment for everyone. The Title IX Coordinator will decide if the incident should be examined further. If such a situation is disclosed to me in class, in a paper assignment, or in office hours, I promise to protect your privacy — I will not disclose the incident to anyone but the Title IX Coordinator. More information on sexual misconduct policies, where to get help, and how to report information, is [available online](#). UD provides 24-hour crisis assistance and victim advocacy and counseling. Contact 302-831-1001, UD Helpline 24/7/365, to get in touch with a sexual offense support advocate.

### HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

The University of Delaware works to promote an academic and work environment that is free from all forms of discrimination, including harassment. As a member of the community, your rights, resources and responsibilities are reflected in the [non-discrimination and sexual misconduct policies](#).

The University of Delaware does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital status, disability, religion, age, veteran status or any other characteristic protected by applicable law in its employment, educational programs and activities, admissions policies, and scholarship and loan programs as required by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable statutes and University policies. The University of Delaware also prohibits unlawful harassment including sexual harassment and sexual violence.

You can report any concerns to the University's Office of Equity & Inclusion, at 305 Hulihan Hall, (302) 831-8063 or you can report anonymously through UD Police (302) 831-2222 or the EthicsPoint Compliance Hotline at [www1.udel.edu/compliance](http://www1.udel.edu/compliance). You can also report any violation of UD policy on harassment, discrimination, or abuse of any person [online here](#).

### INCLUSION OF DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS

Any student who thinks they may need an accommodation based on a disability should contact the [Office of Disability Support Services](#) (DSS) office as soon as possible. The DSS office is located at 240 Academy Street, Alison Hall Suite 130, Phone: 302-831-4643. We will work together to find accommodations for you that ensure you can get the most out of the class as possible.