PS 137:
American Campaigns
and Elections

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The 2008 elections were dramatic, historic, and exciting. But then, nearly every election provides excitement and drama, and the history of the U.S. is written, in part, in accord with electoral outcomes. The real purpose of elections are to allocate political power and, if all goes according to philosophic plan, to provide the central way in which citizens can express their sovereignty. The goal of this course is to give you the tools to understand elections, including their drama, history, and excitement.

Elections are also one of the most common and important sites for conducting political and social scientific research. If all goes well, we will share in the discovery of just what there is to learn from the most important major piece of social science instrumentation in the study of American politics, the National Election Studies. These data are planned on being released for use in the near future. If that happens, we will be sharing in the initial analysis of these data. Even more, I invite you to be direct participants in the creation of a different sort of electoral data, and we will examine the results of your participation before the semester ends.

Elections happen at two different but closely related levels. One is what is sometimes referred to as the “macro” level (akin to macroeconomics) which, in this case, is the level of candidate and campaign. This is the level of large, national perspectives. We begin at this level to examine the historical tectonics of electoral coalitions that have defined our national parties and policy making over the course of our history. We then turn to examine in some detail the “micro” level, in which we examine the voter and how she acquires and uses political information in reaching this seemingly simple act of voting. We complete the course by returning to the macro level to see how the micro forces come to shape the macro outcomes – why, in other words, Bush and Gore effectively tied in 2000, why Bush and Republicans won in 2004, and why Obama and so many Democrats did so in 2008.
We will primarily be using books for the reading assignments. All articles and papers will be available on the class Blackboard page. The books are, in the order to be read:


**Choose Either (or Both) of the Following**


**Others TBA**

**Assignments:**

- Mid-term examination 25%
- Research paper 25% -- topic to be discussed in class
- Final examination 35%
- Course participation 15% -- 10% for overall participation, 5% for research participation, to be discussed in class.
Class Schedule and Readings

January 7  Overview

The Macro View of Elections: Electoral Coalitions and “Techtonics”

January 12  From 1800 to the Era of Good Feelings

Readings: Sundquist, Chapters 2 and 3 (also available on Blackboard)
Aldrich, “The Election of 1800”

January 14  Jacksonian Democracy

Readings: Sundquist, Chapter 4 (also available on Blackboard)

January 19  Holiday

January 21  The Civil War and Reconstruction

Readings: Sundquist, Chapter 5

January 26  1896 and the Progressive Era

Readings: Sundquist, Chapters 7, 8

January 28  The New Deal

Readings: Sundquist, Chapters 10, 11, 15

February 2  The South under Jim Crow, 1896 - 1965

Readings: Sundquist, Chapters 6, 13, 16

February 4  The Great Society

Readings: Sundquist, Chapter 17

February 9  The Reagan Revolution

Readings: Sundquist, chapter 18

February 11  The Republican Revolution, 1994 and after

Readings: TBA
Micro-Foundations of Elections – Who Votes for Whom and Why

February 16 - 18  Presidential Nominations

Readings: Abramson, Aldrich, Rohde (AAR), Chapter 1
          Aldrich, Presidential Nominations, 2008
          Aldrich and Pearson, Presidential Nomination

February 23  **Midterm**, in class

February 25  The Geography and Social Basis of the Vote

Readings: AAR, Chapters 3, 5

March 2 - 4  Turnout

Readings: AAR, Chapter 4

March 9 – 11  **Spring Break**

March 16  Candidate Evaluation

Readings: AAR, 2000 version, Chapter 6 (to Concerns of Electorate)
          TBA

March 18  Retrospective Evaluations:

Readings: AAR, Chapter 7

March 23  Issues

Readings: AAR, Chapter 6, remainder.

March 25  Congress: Macro Forces

Readings: Jacobson, Chapters 1-4
          AAR, Chapters 9, 11

March 30  Congressional Voting

Readings: Jacobson, Chapter 5
          AAR, Chapter 10

April 1 - 8  Experimental social science and other special topics

Readings: TBA
Putting the Pieces Together?

April 13 – 20  Integrating Micro Foundations and Macro Politics

Readings: Either Stimson, entire, or Erikson, et al., Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8, 10
Jacobson, Chapters 6, 7
AAR, Chapters 11, 12

April 22  Conclusions