

Voting and Legislatures

Political Science 314



<http://www.smcm.edu/users/mjgcain>
mjgcain@smcm.edu

Michael J.G. Cain
105 Kent Hall
240.895.4899

This course focuses on four important themes about politics. All of these themes focus on democracy, legislatures, elections and voting. Our first theme concerns elections and electoral processes. Why is voting important in democracy and why do people vote? Do the main political parties respond to the interests of the voter? How do they respond to the voter? Should there be more than two parties in our political system? Our second theme focuses on election methods and processes. Question in this section of the course concern the best means to choose candidates? Are some voting systems better than others? Why or why not? What kind of problems can we expect with voting systems? What types of problems exist at the state and national level? Can we fix them? Our third theme in this course explores the organization of congress and how the leadership or unruly minority coalitions can manipulate voting outcomes in congress. For example, how well do democratic institutions serve the interest of the groups they are supposed to represent? Our focus will be to illustrate how legislatures can be manipulated to serve the interests of a few people, rather than a majority of legislators. This review will lead us to a general understanding of different properties associated with majority rule. The final theme of the course will focus on current issues in national and state legislatures and to better understand the dynamics associated with the 2006 midterm elections. Student will provide weekly updates regarding elections and legislative processes.

The material in this course will provide students with an in-depth understanding of elections and legislative processes. The course is useful for students interested in pursuing a political career in a legislature, because it involves discussions of the organization and rules governing policy votes in legislatures. The material in this course is also useful for students interested in mass politics or grass roots organizing, since we discuss the main variables influencing political actions in elections.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Lectures, Homework, Discussions and Participation

Although there is a lecture component to this class, individual participation is critical for developing a collective perspective on the topics covered in the course. As an incentive to complete the reading assignments and participate in class discussions, you will be graded for your class contributions. Your class participation grade will include attendance and homework assignments. Class participation and homework, including possible quizzes, is worth **30%** of your grade.

Class Participation and Home works	20%
Group Research Paper	20%
Midterm	30%
Final	30%

Group Research Assignment

You will be expected to complete research papers on either elections or legislatures. Groups of four people will be formed early in the semester. Students will be provided with guidelines on the format of the papers and groups will be expected to present their findings at the end of the semester.

Midterm and Final Examinations

The midterm exam is worth **20%** of your final grade. The exam is scheduled after the reading days. I will provide students with an overview of the material on the midterm exam before the exam date. The final exam will be a cumulative two-hour test that is worth **30%** of your final grade. A study guide with topics and questions will be available for the final exam a week before the exam.

Office Hours

Discussions outside of class (with other students or your professors) are an important part of learning at St. Mary's College. I strongly encourage you to speak with me outside of class (who knows, maybe you will have fun, besides getting useful suggestions on the material). My office hours are Monday and Wednesday 4:30-6:00p. If you cannot make these office hours, you can always make an appointment with me for another time. You can also reach me by e-mail during the week if you need some quick feedback. On Fridays I am usually available for afternoon lunches. We can discuss your work, your research ideas, my work, or your ideas about politics.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts are available at ST. MARY'S CAMPUS STORE. Other readings will be available on BLACKBOARD.



1. Riker, William H. *The Art of Political Manipulation*. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press Press, Inc., 1986).
2. Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

In addition to this I will require you regularly read the Washington Post (or New York Times). I recommend that students also read Congressional Quarterly.

TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Voting, Elections and Legislatures

1. ***Why Democracy and Why Elections?***
 - a. J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, "That the Ideally best Form of Government is Representative government," Chapter 3.
2. ***Assumptions about Citizens and Political Theory***
 - a. Shepsle and Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Chapters 1-2.
 - b. Michael Cain, "Theory in Science and Social Science". *Bb*.
3. ***The Decision to Vote: Consumption of Politics or Investment in Politics?***
 - a. Aldrich, John, "Rational Choice and Turnout," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 37, No.1, 1993 (Please skip section on minimax regret.) *Bb/jstor*
 - b. Stewart, Charles, *Analyzing Congress*, "The Choices Voters Make," pp.165-193. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. *Bb*
 - c. Lijphart, Arend, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unsolved Dilemma, *The American*

4. ***Political Parties and Mass Politics***

- a. Downs, Anthony, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy," *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 65, No.2, April 1957. *Bb/jstor*
- b. Riker, William H., "The Two Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 76, No.4, Dec. 1976. *Bb/jstor*

5. ***What Kind of Voting System is Best?***

- a. Donald Saari, *Decisions and Elections*, Chapter 1, pp.1-14. *Bb*
- b. Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, pp. 49-71. Chapter 7.

6. ***Regulating National and State Elections in the United States***

- a. Stewart, Charles, *Analyzing Congress*, "Regulating Elections," pp.194-234. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. *Bb*
- b. Kimberling, William, "The Electoral College" *Federal Election Commission*. www.fec.gov/pdf/eleccoll.pdf. *Bb*
- c. Cain, Michael and Zach Messitte, "Design Flaws in Maryland Elections: A Study of Circuit Court Elections," mimeo, 2006. *Bb*



7. ***Understanding Congress: Policy Making and the Structure of Congress***

- a. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 5. *Bb*
- b. Fenno, Richard F., *The United States Senate: A Bicameral Perspective*. *Bb*
- c. Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *American Political Science Review*, March, 1963. *Bb/jstor*

8. ***Understanding Legislative Outcomes: Policy Making in Flatland***

- a. Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 5.
- b. Riker, William H. *The Art of Political Manipulation*, Chapter 1-2.

9. ***Understanding Legislative Outcomes: Sincere versus Sophisticated Voting and the Consequences of Instability***

- a. Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 6.
- b. Riker, William H. *The Art of Political Manipulation*, Chapter 7 and 11.