

## The Changing American Electorate

<b>Course #</b>	19FCA
<b>Format:</b>	Seminar
<b>Moderator(s):</b>	Nancy Mihevc
<b>Date and Time:</b>	Tuesday, 9:30-11:30 10 weeks, starting September 23
<b>Location:</b>	Smith College, Dewey Hall Common
<b>Maximum number of participants:</b>	18
<b>Auditors accepted:</b>	2

**Purpose:** Many political observers (professionals and amateur political junkies, alike) have been perplexed by voter behavior since the 2016 election cycle. This seminar will explore how, and why, the electorate has changed, and what future changes may be likely.

**Description:** The American electorate has undergone substantial changes in the past 50 years. Truisms that helped us understand voting behavior and attitudes on issues in the late '60s (Unions vote Democratic, college-educated citizens vote Republicans, etc.) no longer apply. Now, scholars argue that "tribalism" explains extreme partisanship; that the white working class votes Republican; that attitudes on immigration, not economics, drive voter choice; that Millennials prefer socialism to capitalism.

Presentation topics for the seminar may include: tracing the political behavior/attitudes of various demographic or geographic groups over time (e.g. white working class, women); in-depth examination of a current group (e.g. Millennials/Gen Z, Latinos); exploring how increasing participation by various groups changes the overall composition of the electorate (African-Americans, young voters, Asians); and tracing changes in public opinion on a particular issue (e.g. gay rights, gun control/safety).

The moderator will attempt to ensure that discussions are balanced.

**Role of participants:** Participants will give a 20-25-minute presentation about some aspect of the American electorate, past or present, and will participate in open discussion during the second half of each session. These discussions will be based on participant responses to surveys circulated by the moderator prior to each session.

**Resources:** Participants will choose among several recommended resources, including A. Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump*, E. Theiss-Morse, et.al., *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 14<sup>th</sup> edition, J. Gest, *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Additional web-based resources will also be available.

**About the Moderator:** Nancy owns a company that conducted political polling at various levels and has volunteered for campaigns since 1960. Prior to becoming an entrepreneur, she taught communication studies at UMass including seminars on political communication.